# CHRISTIANITY IN THE NEW AGE

E. HERMAN

Class BR121

Book .H533

PRESENTED BY

# CHRISTIANITY IN THE NEW AGE

# CHRISTIANITY IN THE NEW AGE

BY

E. HERMAN

Author of "The Meaning and Value of Mysticism," etc.

NEW YORK
FUNK AND WAGNALLS COMPANY

c.p/st 1919a

BT121
.H533

Gift
Publisher
DEC 10 1919

To

My Minister and Friend,

REV. IVOR J. ROBERTON, M.A.,

who taught one "whose eye is Beauty's powerless slave" to discern the Beauty of the Sanctuary, and under whose war-time preaching this book took shape.

# PREFACE

"It is no small prudence to keep silence in an evil time," says Thomas à Kempis; and though the dark night is past and the day of victory has come, silence still commends itself as a counsel of discretion. For this is a time of obscure and tangled issues, of the seething turmoil of new and dying tendencies and the blind struggle of unborn and half-born impulses. What we took to be an ordered map has resolved itself into a chaos of crossing lines, and the only thing to be asserted with confidence about a complex of life and thought so full of intricacy and contradiction is its utter impredicability.

Yet it is precisely at this stage, when our early confidence in our ability to read the signs of the times has been shattered, and we have resigned ourselves to tread an unknown path (sobeit He who leads us does not remain unknown), that there have come to some of us a discernment of the root-causes of our past failure

and present weakness, a perception of our fundamental needs, and a vision of the great Source of reinforcement and renewal which were not ours in the days of our comparative certitude. We have learnt to acquiesce in an obscurity of events and ambiguity of movements which before we have deemed intolerable ; but our acquiescence is not the dull submission of pessimism. It is born rather of the quiet trustfulness of those whom the smaller uncertainties of a fleeting crisis have driven back upon the larger certainties of that permanent reality which gives that crisis its meaning and value. To keep silence concerning the things which have thus come to us may be in accord with the promptings of a justifiable diffidence in face of a responsible task, and with the counsels of a less creditable prudence. But deeper than all such considerations is the conviction that it is precisely at this so perplexing time that the most faltering voice that can speak of " a sure word of prophecy " amid the Babel of conflicting pronouncements, and of a vision of the Desire of Nations walking upon the troubled waters of the world's life, has the burden of utterance laid upon it. Out of such a conviction this book is sent forth.

# Preface

In the nature of things, a volume dealing with the exigencies of the new age upon which we have entered must be largely critical. The effect of prolonged war has been to fling a sharp and inexorable light upon the seamy places of our religious life, to shatter many idols and destroy many illusions. To ignore this in the supposed interests of reconstruction is to make anything like valid reconstruction impossible. I have therefore begun by pointing out in Part I. certain "Perils of the Threshold": an impatience with the past which is threatening to rob us of our present vision, and a tendency to pessimism which spells paralysis. Nor have I hesitated to introduce the element of diagnosis into subsequent chapters. To know and ponder our present state is not merely the first step towards amendment, but such knowledge often carries the whole secret of reconstruction within itself.

In Part II.—"The Christian Message to the New Age"—I have endeavoured to express my sense of the Church's urgent need to recover her teaching function. We have for so long played with such catchwords as "dead knowledge," "abstract thought," and "barren intellectualism," that we have all but forgotten how vital a

thing religious knowledge can be, what world-moving dynamic lies latent in right thinking. "Learn to think," said a shrewd man; "it will profit you—there is so little competition." We are waiting for a Church that will teach us how to think. It is for want of the type of religious instruction that promotes hard, honest thinking that so much religious devotion remains blind, so much noble sacrifice devoid of moral power, so much strenuous endeavour lacking in intelligent purpose. That the Church must once more resume her teaching office, and that in her teaching she must concentrate upon the great fundamental realities of the nature of God and the meaning of the Cross, is writ large in the experience of all who have come into contact with our fighting men. For too long the pulpit has tended to avoid central issues and to decline upon the minor moods and tenses of the Christian experience. To-day it is borne in upon us once more—and in painful fashion—that the Church lives by her message, and that the Church without a message concerning God and the Cross is dead while she liveth.

In devoting Part III. to the consideration of Christianity as "The Great Adventure," I have

sought to emphasise three cognate needs, always present yet never so sharply recognised as to-day. Much that has hitherto been considered necessary for the persistence of Christianity many are now prepared to surrender with more than equanimity ; but three things we must have—an adventurous individual discipleship, an adventurous theology, and an adventurous Church. Believing that the free religious personality is fundamental to Christianity, I put in a plea for a new religious individualism. Haunted by the spectre of the eighteenth-century fiction of the isolated, self-contained individual, we have tended of late to lay a vicious emphasis upon the corporate life of the Church, exalting the corporate Christian consciousness as if it were in opposition to the individual consciousness, a higher stage only to be reached by the sacrifice of individual interests. Such a contention rests, I am persuaded, upon an essentially materialistic conception of the Church, regrettably reinforced in these days by the popular comparison of the Church to an army, and perpetuating the most un-Catholic element in the Roman ideal of the Church. The true Church is founded upon free Christian personality, and stands for a living theology

and for an adventurous policy, very little concerned about securing the continuation of its existence, but supremely concerned for the Kingdom of God.

I am indebted for stimulus to the fine body of religious war literature, especially to those two notable volumes, "Faith or Fear?" and "The Church in the Furnace." A re-reading of Professor Oman's profound and far-seeing book, "Vision and Authority," has greatly helped to confirm and clarify a conception of the Church towards which I had been struggling for some years.

My warmest thanks are due to my husband, who has read the manuscript and made many valuable criticisms and suggestions, and has also revised the proofs.

E. H.

London,
*January*, 1919.

# CONTENTS

## *PART I*

### Perils of the Threshold


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | DETACHMENT FROM THE PAST | 3 |
| 2. | THE SNARE OF PESSIMISM | 30 |


## *PART II*

### The Christian Message to the New Age


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3. | THE CHURCH AS TEACHER | 53 |
| 4. | THE NEED FOR A NEW THOUGHT OF GOD | 79 |
| 5. | THE HIGHWAY OF THE CROSS | 105 |
| 6. | THE CROSS AND THE ALTAR | 126 |


## *PART III*

### The Great Adventure


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7. | THE NEED FOR AN ADVENTUROUS THEOLOGY | 163 |
| 8. | THE CALL FOR ADVENTUROUS DISCIPLESHIP | 196 |
| 9. | THE CALL FOR AN ADVENTUROUS CHURCH | 224 |

# *PART I*

# PERILS OF THE THRESHOLD

# CHRISTIANITY IN THE NEW AGE

## CHAPTER I

### DETACHMENT FROM THE PAST

### I

EVERY great crisis in history appears to those who pass through it as a cleaving sword severing the past from the present. Yesterday recedes into antiquity; to-morrow is seen as the first chapter in an entirely new book of life. In the shaking of things that can be shaken, things that cannot be shaken vanish from view. The law of evolution seems no longer to operate; the idea of continuity appears untenable. From the narrow island of the present we gaze across to the continent of the past, and find it hard to realise that only a little while ago the strip we stand on was part of that mainland which already seems so strange and shadowy in the haze of distance. When we are told that our insulation must spell impoverishment, we reply with an incredulous smile. Things have happened overnight, as it were, which our arm-chair philosophers

and antiquarians little reck of. New and unfamiliar problems have arisen such as the past never knew, and therefore cannot help to solve. A new vision and á new demand have created a new mind that cannot work with the old tools.

This sense of sudden and forcible detachment from the past has been characteristic of all great historic revolutions, but perhaps it has never been so widespread or so acute as at the present juncture. True, it does not emerge with equal sharpness in all classes and types of men. In the case of what is conveniently termed "the man in the street," it has not wrought so palpable a change, for "the man in the street" has never been distinguished by an historical mind. On the contrary, his lack of imagination has caused him to hold tradition in unmitigated contempt. For him the dead were always in the wrong, or rather they did not exist at all, for his conception of human solidarity is limited by the circle of the living. Nor does this sense of cleavage emerge most strikingly in quarters more or less dominated by scientific ideas. For the scientist the past is certainly of great value. He freely uses its discoveries and achievements, and takes its struggles and aspirations into full account. He does not, however, attribute any binding authority to it; his attitude is completely free and critical. He rejects the findings of the past whenever the facts of the case demand it without the ghost of a regret, let alone a scruple;

and while he may admire and even reverence its achievements, he never does so on the ground of their venerable antiquity. It is indeed only when we turn to the Christian community and to the circle of those who are, often unconsciously, influenced by Christian teaching that we see the full effect of an upheaval that has cut time in two.

For Christian thought has always gloried in its historical continuity. The Church has lived and moved in an atmosphere of tradition and symbolism. Theologians have ever been distinguished by a strong and sensitive historical instinct. When the mind of the age challenged theology with being inadequate to the demands of the time, they contended that such inadequacy, where it existed, was due, not to an exaggerated reverence for the past, but to a failure to grasp and interpret it aright. Similarly, when critics of the traditional Church organisation emphasised its utter failure to attract the masses of men, they invariably attributed that failure, not to a vicious adherence to the old forms, but to an inability to enter into their spirit and thus adapt them to modern needs.

But within the last three or four years this attitude has received a rude shock. War has revealed a situation it can no longer meet. In being brought face to face with "Tommy," we have made the disconcerting discovery of a whole nation radically estranged from traditional

forms of Christianity. The comforting reflection that, after all, soldiers are abnormal and ephemeral appearances, destined to vanish into thin air at the first touch of peace, did not bear a moment's scrutiny; for Tommy was not a soldier in the old sense of the term: he was simply a student, a clerk, or a mechanic, in khaki. He existed before the war, and will continue to exist afterwards. He represents, in fact, the great public whose temper and needs we had studied for so long from a distance, and now at last have been given an opportunity of seeing at close range. Our contact with him has flung a shrewd and searching light into dark places. It has revealed a soul of goodness in the most unlikely men, and also an uncompromising opposition to conventional ideals of saintliness; an astounding ignorance of elementary religious truths, and an almost uncannily sure instinct for vital reality; a wistful longing for a truer life, and a humiliating contempt for conventional religion. And, most disconcerting of all, it has revealed, together with a new kinship and ease of approach along all simple human ways, a cleavage in deeper things between us who represent the Church and the men who in some respects are so near to the Kingdom, which no amount of mere explanation can bridge. It is easy to account for this cleavage in an historical fashion, but that does not lessen its sheer intractability. After one has succeeded in tracing its origin

and following its development through the long series of blunders which stain the history of the Church, one is still confronted with the facts in their unmitigated grimness, and not a whit nearer the solution of the problem. One is still face to face with a de-Christianised England which none the less retains an instinct for Christianity, but an instinct to which our religious conceptions and the way in which we express them utterly fail to appeal.

We find no difficulty in believing that it took decades of preaching and teaching before a people such as the Chinese could be brought to anything like an intelligent grasp of the simplest Christian conceptions, but since the war we have also come to suspect that those who will address themselves in the near future to the task of evangelising England must be prepared for almost as long a period of sowing the seed. The popular superstition that generations of Sunday-school teaching and an hereditary reverence for the Scriptures put the average Englishman into a position to grasp the Gospel and its implications almost instinctively has been finally exploded, and we have come to realise that the evangelisation of a nominally Christian country is perhaps an even longer and harder business than pioneer missionary work in heathen lands.

Chaplains of all denominations confirm this diagnosis. True, not a few of them find it easy to appeal to the men in frank, unconventional

talk about the great realities, but it almost seems that the short-cut to success in talking to the men is to forget one's theological and ecclesiastical antecedents; and this is full of grave augury for the future. The time is at hand when men in whom a new spirit has been kindled by the homely and untrammelled ministrations of their chaplains will return to the routine of ordinary life, and will need to be urged to seek connection with some religious body or congregation. They cannot be allowed to remain unconnected units; nor can such an organisation as the Y.M.C.A. take the place of Church fellowship, for man is destined to worship in families, and to put an association intended only for men in the place of the Church is to create in the end a circumscribed and distorted outlook. But will these men find a type of life that appeals to them—a type of life, even, that they can understand—in the average congregation? Many a chaplain is filled with misgiving as he looks into the near future. He realises that no amount of interpretation and adaptation can make the man he has learned to know in the trenches fit into the framework of the Church he knows so well. He thinks of those who, baptised in the cloud of fire and in the sea of blood, have come to the Lord and Redeemer of their life: how would they regard the average respectable congregation repeating the old formulæ and working along the old lines, and how would that con-

gregation regard them ? He sees that not adaptation but reconstruction covering the whole range of the Church's life and thought is needed ; but alas ! those who clamour for reconstruction are mostly without her gates, while those inside are either blindly complacent or waste their energies in a pathetic effort to put new patches on an old garment. They do not realise that a new task demands new tools, and many of them still refuse to admit that the task is new. Said a young chaplain on his return home, " When I met my congregation again and realised with what trivial and irrelevant things they were occupied, and how little they understood of the big, vital things we had been up against in the trenches, it turned my heart sick within me."

These words are representative. They express a feeling which is increasingly prevalent among men of vision. There is a growing sense of the imperative need for reconstruction—the consciousness of a demand which goes far deeper than questions of organisation or method, and whose central challenge is to the spirit of the Church rather than to her institutions—and there seems little chance of that demand being responded to by its membership. Potentially the future is full of hope. There is a new wistfulness abroad which is surely God's opportunity, a new instinct for what is genuinely spiritual among those who are ignorant of the current spiritual vocabulary, and a new appreciation of the

humility, the self-giving love, that are the essence of Christianity. But over against that there is a tragic failure on the part of the average Church member to realise this state of things. The stirring and pulsing of a new life outside the Church seems to have no correlative within.

## II

But while this attitude of self-criticism on the part of thoughtful Churchmen, with its demand for radical reconstruction, holds the promise of a golden future, it has its peculiar perils. Born of that sense of cleavage between the past and the present which so revolutionary an experience as ours inevitably creates, it easily slides into the assumption that the present situation is entirely new; not with the newness of summer fruit consummating a continuous process of growth from the first green shoots to the leafy crown gemmed with blossoms, but rather with the newness of an unclassifiable meteor flashing suddenly into the sky, whose genesis and relation to the ascertained astronomical system no scientist can trace. And it is inevitable that such an assumption, coupled with the growing conviction of the Church's inadequacy, should breed qualities which, if unchecked, must in the long run cripple constructive thought and action—impatience with the past and pessimism with regard to the future.

## Detachment from the Past

The times *are* new—of that there can be no doubt. History does not repeat itself in any literal and detailed fashion, no matter what the old adage says. And if each age, however naturally it seems to have sprung out of the preceding one, includes an element of originality, how much more this startling day of ours, which has brought the collapse of long-established systems and the emergence of ideals that are changing the face of the world before our eyes? Yet it, like its predecessors, is not in its essence a negation and refutation of the past. Its reaction against tradition owes its very strength to the educative pressure of that which it antagonises, and not a few of its most novel features strike hidden roots into a past remoter than the age we have just left behind us. It must be remembered also that movements and tendencies which, at first sight, seem to mark a new departure in a direction opposite to that of the past, are not seldom seen, on closer examination, to be a new departure, indeed, but not at all in the direction to which they seemed to point.

A notable instance of our current misreading of contemporary movements is seen in the case of the alleged revival of interest in the future life. Before the war, it might have been said of the great mass of men that they were totally indifferent to the question of a life to come. Preachers found it difficult to interest their congregations in the subject; books on immortality

had only a lukewarm reception; novels dealing with the whole gamut of theological questions had little or nothing to say about it. But with the sacrifice of so many young lives, the subject once more became of vital interest, and to-day it looms large in the popular mind. Men who sneered before are now stretching wistful hands towards the Unseen; women whose practical creed was a dainty materialism are seeking the Land that is very far off. Wherever a home has its empty chair, there the sorrow-laden air is murmurous with eager, inarticulate questionings. There must be a future life, cry a thousand stricken hearts; for this life is too short and narrow to hold the treasure of our love. There must be golden streets up yonder; no meaner pavement would be worthy of the golden lads who loved not their lives unto death.

But beautiful and ennobling as all this is, and precious in the sight of God, it does not in itself constitute a religious interest in immortality; and it is with the religious interest we are concerned. Even a cursory glance at current books on the subject goes to reveal this. Take Sir Oliver Lodge's "Raymond," for instance, as the book that may claim to be typical of its class. It is not concerned with the life beyond in any deeply spiritual sense. It enshrines no prophetic vision of our eternal destiny; it deals with no spacious and dynamic conception of the Divine purpose. Its object is solely to establish

the validity of certain messages purporting to come from the dead. The motive is not primarily religious but scientific, or quasi-scientific; and the weight of interest does not fall upon the future at all, but upon the present. "Does my boy live? Can he communicate with me? Do those messages which I receive really come from him?" These questions—heart-cries welling up from the pure depths of sorrowing love, and therefore demanding our most reverent sympathy—are not in themselves religious questions at all; nor are the answers supplied by Sir Oliver Lodge and others religious answers. How far removed, indeed, such inquiries are from a genuinely religious interest in immortality may be seen by comparing the temper and outlook of a book like "Raymond" with those of the Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse is one of those books which, obscure, and, in one sense, remote from our day, yet speaks to us with no uncertain voice. It was written for communities which had precious memories of their martyred dead, and it came to them at a time when the first passionate exaltation of the age of martyrdom had given place to declension and questioning, and "doubts would come if God had kept his promises to men." "Where are our martyred dead?" one can hear aged mothers crying from out the dim past. "Are they indeed before the throne of God, wearing the amaranthine crown of victory? Did

they indeed die for an everlasting kingdom? Will they soon return with their Lord?" Such questions doubtless stirred the ageless mother-heart and troubled the mind of manhood then as now. But though they too found their answer in the Apocalyptic vision, they were not central to its interest in the life beyond. The Apocalyptic vision is not conceived of in the manner of a spiritualistic experiment; it is a large prophetic vision of the purposes of God with the world. Its symbolism was that of its age, but it is used to convey an ethical and spiritual message for all times. In it the dead speak, not of earth's trivialities, but of the noblest strivings and aspirations of mankind. They appear as witnesses, not to their own existence, but to the grace and truth that are at the heart of the Universe. Nothing, then, could be wider of the mark than to identify the present-day anxiety concerning the dead with the Christian hope. So long as man is human, so long will bereaved love ask for tidings of its dear ones beyond the veil. The attitude is neither new nor in itself religious; it has merely reappeared to-day in a new form. Whereas formerly a materialistic science poured scorn upon "supernatural" phenomena, and spiritualism was at the mercy of superstition and fraud, science has now recovered from its materialistic debauch, and is investigating spiritualistic phenomena with open and even reverent mind. That is greatly to the good; but as we have seen,

it does not mean that spiritualistic inquiry is dominated by religious motives. It is, on the whole, a hopeful sign of the times; but it does not point in the direction many optimists imagine.

## III

But of all tendencies which hide the true significance of present-day movements from us, none is more disabling than that impatience with the past which is the besetting sin of prophetic spirits. It is not merely that these movements cannot be justly estimated, or even recognised for what they are, without constant reference to the past; the interpretative and illuminating function of the past is, after all, not its most momentous function, and its exclusive use as a medium of elucidation may, in fact, militate against the more vital interpretation from the standpoint of present insight and experience. Life is not ruled by precedent, and it is more important that I should be able to read the signs of the times by the light of the Spirit guiding us here and now than merely by the reflected beam that streams from the past. That reflection will surely serve to clarify my vision and correct my judgment, but it must never be allowed to usurp the place of immediate apprehension and present insight.

The past, however, is far more than a key

or an interpreter. It is itself not yet wholly elucidated. It is waiting for us to elicit its more vital meaning, its fuller content. Like the Bible, which since the war has become a new book to so many, it awaits our slow discovery. We are —and rightly so—impatient of traditionalism. Why should we go back to Nicæa for our theology, and to the Middle Ages for our ecclesiastical institutions? But this is not a question of theology or of Church organisation; it is something far more primary that we are concerned with. Is there nothing in the past history of the Church—in the clash of theological controversies, the shaping of religious ideals, the history of classic institutions, the action and reaction of tendencies that have gone to create rival schools of thought and to rend the unity of the Church Catholic—is there nothing in all this that was wrought and written, not for its time, but for ours? Is there nothing in Clement and Origen, in Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Wesley, that they themselves perceived but dimly in the totality of its implications, and is waiting to yield its hidden treasure to us and to our children?

The question suggests the endless labour of historical investigation, and we, who are not historical experts, and upon whom the shortness of the time and the urgency of immediate tasks press heavily, shrink from such slow processes. But here, if anywhere, the warning of "more haste, less speed" applies, and our instinct for

immediacy and short-cuts has already too often wasted the precious time we thought to save. Years ago we used to quote approvingly the Oxford rhyme which informed us that

> Greek flesh-worship, Roman luxury and sty of Epicurus;
> They will kill us ere Professor Caird's philosophy can cure us.

But we are learning at last that Christianity, like all vital processes, is a slow cure, and that its slowness is its efficacy. We are still too much under the sway of an ideal of quick efficiency which is typified in the Student Volunteer motto, "The evangelization of the world in this generation." A renewed study of the Church's history —a study not pedantic or antiquarian, yet as deep as mental candour, imagination and humility can make it—will not only illuminate the present with revealing light; it will—what is far more to the point—make that original, long-delayed contribution to the present which is the justification, as it is the glory, of such study. Suddenly, as we trace the growth of some dominating idea, or read the deathless words of some master-spirit, it will be as the swinging back of long-closed doors, and we shall enter into the inheritance that has waited for us through long years.

An age of democracy should be the last to show any contempt for the past. We claim communion with all men; shall we draw the line at death? We appreciate the humorous

aspect of the self-contained eighteenth-century individual, "author of himself and knowing no other kin"; shall we contemplate a self-contained and isolated age that refuses affiliation to other ages without a smile? We have scant patience with the pale contemplative, who cuts himself off from the society of Tom, Dick, and Harry, and retires into a select brotherhood; but why are we so tolerant of the robust and healthy present-day citizen, who cultivates the acquaintance of his barber and his billiard-marker, but refuses to keep company with Plato or St. Augustine? A democratic instinct which embraces only its contemporaries is a strangely limited and exclusive thing. It is perfectly true that preoccupation with the great ones of the past may blind us to the existence of present greatness walking incognito among us; but it is truer still that a wise acquaintance with the past will make us less likely to allow greatness to pass us unnoticed, for it will teach us how easy it is to pass Socrates in the street and take him for a bottle-washer, and how often we have derided our dreamers and stoned our prophets.

We may fairly claim for this age of ours that it has freed itself from all superstitious reverence for tradition, and is not likely to relapse into the cramping cult of antiquity. All the more should we take the lessons of history deeply to heart. The sobriety of vision which enables us to see the mistakes of the past with a perhaps unprece-

dented clearness, ought surely also to put us into an unparalleled position for appropriating its most precious legacies. What will it avail that we view the past to-day unblinded by a superstitious reverence, if the same penetration does not serve us to elicit its hidden significance as the uncritical devotees of antiquity could not do? We think we are entering upon a great period of reconstruction. If that is so, how can we justify our failure to avail ourselves of the critical and path-breaking work of past ages, which are a God-given preparation for such a period, and find their only vindication therein? If we resolved to devote at least part of the time which we now give to the often futile discussion of purely ephemeral problems to the patient study of some great historic movement or system of thought germane to present difficulties, we would gain a depth of insight and a capacity for the effective handling of current questions that would astonish us. We need hardly repeat that such study cannot take the place of that direct, experimental approach to our problems from which nothing can absolve us; but it ought to take the place of a good deal of disputation *about* these problems, which at best is but "the honourable trifling of the conquered."

Moreover, the past is not something external to us, which we may ignore if we please; it is woven into the texture of our own thought and life. Its mistakes, which we see so clearly to-

day, have determined our own bent to an extent we can hardly estimate ; its fallacies and superstitions have more foothold in us than we know, their expression in us differing too widely from their original form to be readily recognised. Its achievements and discoveries have entered into our blood, giving us that grasp and sagacity, that insight and perception, which we so seldom trace to their true source. Like Molière's peasant, who talked prose without knowing it, we constantly reproduce—and often in tragic manner—the very past we so glibly criticise. We speak of Bergson with an Aristotelian or Platonic accent, as the case might be. We discuss Grace under the tyrannous shadow of Augustine, and where we violently repudiate the term and substitute for it the Indwelling of God, we still remain under the spell of the ancients ; for we seldom use the words without falling into the old Greek vice of failing to distinguish between metaphor and reality, illustration and argument, being deceived by spatial and physical analogies. It is not a question of whether we shall be influenced by the past or not. We *are* influenced by it in the most intimate and inescapable way. What remains to be settled is whether we shall allow ourselves to be blindly or intelligently influenced : whether we prefer the dead hand of the past to gird and lead us unbeknown to ourselves, or whether we choose to lay the living hand of the present upon the past in appropriation and dis-

crimination. These questions surely admit of only one answer. We cannot escape from the past, and the only way of ceasing to be its blind, unconscious slaves and becoming its free, intelligent heirs is, first of all, to study it, not necessarily with the minuteness of the historical expert—a process which, needless to say, is open only to the very few—but with the teachable mind of those who would discern the way of God in the broad movements of the Church's history.

A great discovery awaits such students, for it is one of the functions of the past to reveal Him in whom all the ages live. If the history of the Apostolic Church reveals His educative and inspiring touch, can we deny it of any later period, or of the history of religious thought outside the Church altogether? The truths of history are *not* "accidental"; they have a spiritual authority, a timelessness, a particularity, a dynamic and creative power that belong to life. They are not alien to us. In them Jesus appears in "yet another form," and our most intimate experiences are confirmed, interpreted and enlarged by contact with them. We hear His voice saying, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?" And our fragmentary and incoherent experiences are unified by being related to the larger whole. One wonders how much of our slowness to discern in the movements of our time Him who leads all the generations on is due to our failure to give heed to

" the voice behind." To confine the living word of Christ for the hour to the intuitions of that hour is as narrowing as to confine it within the boards of the Bible.

## IV

We are all agreed that the times call for theological reconstruction. Of theological restatement, *i.e.* the translation of traditional conceptions into modern language, we have had enough; what we need is the creation of new conceptions corresponding to our new experience of God. And in approaching this great task, much will depend upon our attitude to the past.

There are two classes of people, other than the upholders of traditionalism, who invariably oppose theological reconstruction. There are those who make war upon theology in the name of religion, and those who make war upon what they call traditional theology in the name of theological freedom—by which is generally meant the right to ignore the past. The first tell us that it is not theology that matters but the soul's vital communion with God, and that theology, so far from promoting that converse, has always obscured and hindered it. The second contend that what is wanted is not theological *re*-construction, but construction *de novo*. They are not merely im-

patient but positively intolerant of the past; they demand that the theological slate be wiped clean before they consent to set chalk to it.

The first type is a belated sufferer from that vicious opposition between religion and theology which a generation ago produced some of the most futile discussions upon which strong men ever wasted brain and breath. Theology, while entirely distinct from religious experience, is inseparable from it; and we have coupled our need for a new vision of God with the demand for theological reconstruction because there can be no authentic theological reconstruction except in the light of a present vision. It is not enough to say that theology is the description, the intellectual formulation and interpretation, of religious experience;* it is itself largely, though not entirely, created and conditioned by that experience. In other words, every authentic religious experience involves a living theology, and the experience of each successive generation carries within itself the demand for theological reconstruction. If it is true that experience is the vital part of the subject-matter of theology, it is also true that theology is part of religious experience; for experience, where it is something more than a mere devotional feeling or mystic

* To say that "theology is only a side-product of Christianity" (Charles E. Raven, "What think Ye of Christ?" p. 51) is beside the mark. One might as well say that Newton's discovery of the law of gravitation is a by-product of the apple as it falls from the tree.

mood, *includes a creative demand for a reasoned interpretation.*

Where, on the other hand, the rights of theology are fully recognised, but it is insisted that each age must begin its theologising entirely *de novo*, we are faced with a depreciation of the past which rests upon a misconception of its significance for the present. Such a demand proceeds upon the assumption that a theology which takes the thought of past ages into serious account is to be deprecated as "traditional." But while a servile and superstitious attitude to the past obviously spells traditionalism, what makes a theology traditional is not docility to the teaching of the past, but disregard of the demands of the present. The function of theology is to interpret the facts of religious experience *as they present themselves to its own age;* and where it ignores these facts, or tries to bring them under superseded categories—*i.e.* where it is traditional—it *ipso facto* ceases to be theology in any real sense, and becomes part of that dogmatic inheritance which it is the business of theology to examine and interpret in the light of the present day. Mobility is an essential of all living theology. Theological thought will change from age to age in proportion as it is genuine; and a serious and sympathetic study of the past, so far from arresting the development of theology, is precisely the factor which will guide it from the eddies of mere flux and change into the broad stream of progress.

## Detachment from the Past

This is sufficiently evident on the surface. The student, for instance, whose ignorance of history prevents him from recognising the Gnostic touch in Mr. H. G. Wells, or the recrudescence of mediæval Pantheism in a type of theology still called "New" in some quarters, or the Pelagianism peculiar to some novelists in treating of sin and redemption, or the Docetism which ensnares certain modern writers who imagine themselves to be thinking in Johannine categories, will not be the man whose estimate of present-day theological tendencies will be of much account. No one really knows the spirit of his age except in so far as he can trace its relation to the spirit of past ages. The past does not live in books merely. It follows us, and often it is its least desirable characteristics that have a disconcerting trick of survival and resurrection. Hence it comes about that the "New" theologian, who makes a virtue of starting clear of the traditional incubus, generally ends in producing a composite and motley system, wondrously patched together out of fragments of old and superseded theories —the only really new thing about it being the thread of temperament and of present-day mental emphasis and accent which keeps the patches together.

But the study of the past has a deeper reference to the work of theological reconstruction than this obvious application goes to show. In our haste to escape from the bonds of ancient

and authoritative tradition, we have often forgotten that the present has its traditions also, and that their hold upon us is as paralysing as, and far more insidious than, any shackles forged by the past. "The air is thick with bastard traditions," as Dr. Hort reminds us, "which carry us captive unawares while we seem to ourselves to be exercising our freedom and our instinct for truth. The traditions of the hour or the age are as indubitably external to us, and as little founded of necessity on freshly perceived truth, as any traditions of the past. The danger of them lies in their disguise. The single negative fact that they make war on some confessed tradition prevents us from discovering that they too draw their force no less from an authority, until it is too late and we have lost or damaged that power of independent vision which is but braced and harmonised by a known and honoured tradition."* Each age has its atmosphere—the medium, at once revealing and deceptive, through which the children of that age see truth. In proportion as the age is a rebel against its predecessors, that atmosphere is rendered more stimulating and also more delusive; for while, on the one hand, it gives a keen edge to thought, yet, on the other, it impairs its integrity. We think our revolt against conventional theology is original to ourselves, whereas in reality it is due to our passive and almost unconscious

* "The Way, the Truth, the Life," pp. 91-2.

absorption of the atmosphere of revolt. We imagine we are speaking out of our own experience, whereas we are merely voicing our more or less unreflective participation in the feeling of our age. Its prejudices deflect the course of our experience, preventing us from making a completely honest and untrammelled venture upon the spiritual life. Its antipathies preclude our adequate understanding of aspects of experience, not in the least alien to us by nature, but rendered remote by the atmosphere of an age to which they are alien. At every step we have to question and sift our own impressions, asking how much of them is due to the impact of reality upon us, and how much to prepossessions derived from the age we live in. And never need we interrogate our experience more searchingly than when we are conscious of entire freedom. Our search is not for a pleasant or plausible theory of certain appearances—for a comforting and medicinal explanation of what goes on in our souls—but for truth; and truth is always compelling. It does not offer itself to our free and easy choice: it is "never that which we choose to believe, but always that which we are under a necessity to believe." *

It is from the entanglement and confusion of our delusive contemporary atmosphere, with its fatal effect upon our power of discerning truth, that a right study of the past will deliver us.

* *Ibid.*, p. 93.

In its mirror bastard traditions are readily discerned, old things masquerading as new are seen stripped of their modern trappings, and, what is most important of all, that which is really new—the genuine and authentic contribution of our age to religious thought—is liberated from obscuring factors and shown in its true bearings and potencies. Under the disciplinary pressure of the great thoughts of the past, our own characteristic insight into truth disentangles itself from its occasional and ephemeral setting and fructifies apace. For the insight of the moment can only fructify as it is related to the whole coherent field of thought throughout the ages, and the unhistoric mind is always the limited, the uncatholic, mind, no matter though it speak the language of advanced liberalism. If we take the thought of one age only for our province, we must not expect to be anything but provincial in our thinking. Nor will it mend matters if we study the past merely in order to discover how much of its thought we may conscientiously cast on the scrap-heap, and not rather in order to elicit its meaning and significance for to-day. The right study of the past involves an unfailing patience, a scrupulous candour; above all, a profound humility that belongs to ripe spiritual culture. It is not easy, but it is worth while—supremely worth while for those who are not professional theologians, but who as preachers and teachers are in peculiar peril of allowing a

barren revolt against fallen theological idols to absolve them from the task of patient reconstruction, and are ever tempted by popular demands to put a superficial effectiveness in the place of vital truth. On the lower level, the cultivation of the historian's temper will save us again and again from the controversial infirmity known as "whipping a dead cat"; on the higher, it will help to shape in us that power of apprehending truth which is a fundamental condition of spiritual leadership.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SNARE OF PESSIMISM

### I

A TENDENCY to pessimism is the haunting besetment of thoughtful minds. It is the creeping paralysis of the Church, and her imminent peril in a day such as this. One is aware, of course, that optimism rather than pessimism is the rule in some quarters to-day. The selfless heroism of our soldiers and sailors, the spirit of comradeship and sacrifice which has invaded all classes of society, and the note of spiritual wistfulness often found in the least likely places are construed by some as nothing less than the conversion of the Empire to the spirit of Christ. But on the whole an atmosphere of gloom prevails among thoughtful Christian people. The apocalypse of greed, treachery and cruelty which Germany has shown to the world, and the growing disregard of moral laws and sanctions among our own people, combine to alarm us. We are confronted with a world largely fallen from standards of scrupulous honesty and stainless honour ; a world in which reverence, sensitiveness, and true chivalry are rare even among the educated

classes—indeed, one is sometimes tempted to say, rarer among the educated classes than among simple folk. Once more we believe in evil, in sin. We have seen the devil, and our eyes are darkened. We do not deny the splendid revelations of undreamed-of potencies for good which the war has brought us ; but they seem brief meteoric flashes beside the solid lump of apathy, selfishness and dishonesty that obtrudes at every turn in the level walks of everyday life.

That it is growing increasingly hard to get the people inside the Churches, need not unduly alarm us in itself ; but taken in conjunction with the fact that every educational and ethical movement which does not appeal more or less directly to self-interest or to the commercial instincts has an equally decreasing hold upon our people, it becomes gravely symptomatic. The scope of education is tending to be more and more narrowed by technical aims, and disinterested, non-academic courses of study, such as those held under the auspices of the University Extension Movement, or the Home Reading Union, make a very slight appeal.

One holds no brief for Victorian amateur æstheticism and literary posing. It is quite true that much of the old interest in art and literature was artificial, and that its decline is partly due to a reaction in favour of reality. The young lady of leisure who could not understand how anyone could live without belonging

to a Browning society and joining a Pre-Raphaelite circle is not greatly to be regretted. But while, in many sections of society, these studies were no more than a fashionable cult and an irritating pose, there were thousands upon thousands of sincere, unpretentious people who pursued them in an attitude of pure disinterestedness and from a genuinely spiritual impulse. That such an impulse is even half as common to-day, few would care to assert. Say, if you will, that the old literary and humanitarian ideals have crumbled at the touch of reality. That may be entirely true; but it does not touch our contention that we lack the disinterestedness and the spiritual impulse to create new ideals more in consonance with reality. And if indeed the revival of the corporate consciousness is creating a new altruism, this does not make up for the lack of the spiritual motive power which alone can direct it into fruitful paths.

Now all this is not pessimism; it is merely looking facts in the face. Pessimism supervenes when we construe these facts as a fresh demonstration of the utter bankruptcy of human nature. And it need not surprise us to find pessimism once more in the ascendant to-day. A pessimistic outlook is bound to be the besetting temptation of all who have sufficient clarity of vision to see the facile optimism of five years ago as it appears in the grim, remorseless light which the war has shed upon the roseate view of life that preceded it. One need only open pre-war volumes of

theological and philosophical Reviews in order to realise to how large an extent even the most thoughtful lived in a fool's paradise, and how inevitable therefore the present reaction is. Taking an instance at random, we find an accomplished writer in an American periodical making severe strictures upon the Christian *askesis* which bids us destroy the offending member rather than fail of the true life :—

> To be sure, if one is so badly born as that, he has no other resource. But normal, ordinary people have no such difficulties with their eyes or other members as this. . . . Paul, struggling and praying to be delivered from his "body of death," is exceptional. He is not a type. We may praise him, but we are misled by him if we fall into his way of thinking of the good life as a fight. The Platonic conception of our moral task as consisting essentially, not in an internecine civil war in our members, but in an intelligent organisation of the many elements of our richly endowed nature, is much more rational and wholesome. Ideal goodness is simply the amplest expression of human nature. . . . And the Platonic view is not only truer to the experience of twentieth-century Americans than the militant and ascetic view with which we are so familiar, but it is more in accord with the general conception we are coming to have of civilisation. The old times, when men had to fight for their lives against savage beasts, and still more savage men, are passing. More and more the life of civilised men is actually becoming a vast co-operative, constructive activity.*

* Dr. G. R. Dodson, in the *Harvard Theological Review*, January, 1913.

Such a passage as this may be viewed in two different ways by the present-day pessimist, according as his view of the situation is shallower or deeper. He may tell us that it proves how sadly we have degenerated from our pre-war idealism, since no writer in his senses would describe civilised life in such terms to-day. Or he may argue—and with far more justification—that the war has revealed how false such optimistic judgments were at any time. The good life *is* a fight. Men *always* carry the enemy within themselves. War at its worst may be a more hopeful thing than the bland, cultured, unscrupulous fight for wealth that marked American life in days of peace, concealing the passions of sheer savagery behind a cold and calculating exterior. Human nature has always been a tragic quantity—its fitful and obscure impulse towards good overridden by an innate bias towards evil, its high resolves betrayed by weakness where they were not beaten to earth by base lusts, its achievements ambiguous, its progress illusory. War has not brought a sudden accretion of evil ; it has merely unveiled the evil that lay latent through long years of ease and opulence, overlaid by social amenities and by those traditions of decency which have always gone to veil the ugly things of life from our purblind eyes.

That this second view is the truer and deeper, few would care to question. Long years of ease

and opulence have indeed blinded our eyes to the facts. While the blatant luxury, the unscrupulous mammonism, and the naked materialism of the age before the war did not escape our judgment, we were, on the whole, lamentably insensitive to the smug and demure selfishness, the polite refusal of every heroic demand, the unformulated and often unconscious materialism which underlay the smooth, unostentatious, strictly respectable lives of middle-class folk, who held the luxuries and vices of the class above them in righteous abhorrence. Nor did we fathom the paganism which animated our social and industrial system—a paganism with every hideous possibility both of cynicism and savagery. Small wonder that our sudden discovery that the devil was not dead delivered us over to pessimism! Yet pessimism is always an enemy more to be feared than the most puerile of roseate delusions. From a groundless optimism there is a straight though hard road through disillusionment to sober thinking; but there is no such straight road back from pessimism to sanity. Optimism, however little foothold it may have in present actuality, always has some hold upon reality. It anticipates things to come; it always looks upon truth, though it be obliquely and through a deceptive medium. But to surrender to pessimism means never to see the face of truth again until the soul is cured of its distemper. The pessimist cannot see things as they are, for he has put the light out.

And pessimism is never so dangerous as when it seeks an escape from its own conclusions. As long as it contents itself with the investigation of problems and conditions, it exercises a salutary corrective function, and we could ill spare the illuminating force of its ruthless and sombre diagnosis. It is when pessimism forgets its own creed and applies itself to therapeutics that we have cause to fear ; for nowhere is it truer that the cure may be worse than the disease.

## II

The pessimism of religious people has always been of a twofold nature, and given birth to one or other of two distinct theories of the Church, or the Christian Society. There has always been a pessimism concerning the state of the world which, in the case of Christian souls, often led to a revived hope in the Church, and a pessimism regarding the state of the Church which often looked hopefully to the world as the theatre of the Spirit's operations. (Of the deeper pessimism, which includes both Church and world in its condemnation, it is not necessary to speak here.) The first of these two types of pessimism has given rise to two distinct attitudes, both of which are with us to-day.

On the one hand, earnest minds are craving for a spiritual society whose strength shall be,

not in its numbers, but in the purity, sincerity, and whole-hearted consecration of its membership ; whose weapons of warfare shall not be the carnal ones of external organisation and statecraft, but the armoury of the Spirit ;—a Church, in short, of the primitive and Apostolic type, owing nothing to worldly prestige and influence, and disdaining all adventitious aids to impressiveness. Based upon regenerated personality, such a Church would never seek to attract the curious public, or sacrifice the sanctity and freedom of the individual to institutional ends. Its only machinery would be the quiet word of witness, the systematic teaching of truth, and the unostentatious social service that needs no advertising or spectacular propaganda ; its only mission to bear witness to the things of the Spirit, that it might call out from the world those in whose hearts the same Spirit had already spoken His impelling word. Such a Church would remain numerically small, attracting only an elect minority—the few " chosen " among the many " called."

This ideal is far more common to-day than is generally supposed. Many earnest spirits outside the pale of organised Christianity secretly cherish the dream of a pure and holy Family of God, of which the actual seems an intolerable travesty. And within the Church also the demand for a true Body of Christ, separated from the world—nay, uncompromisingly opposed to it—

is once more becoming articulate. Her best sons recognise that her weakness is due to her increasing worldliness of temper and outlook, to her dishonouring alliances with the very powers she is pledged to combat. They see her bartering her birthright of spiritual triumph for the empty promise of a spectacular success, losing her soul and not even gaining the world in exchange. And the remedy suggested is a stern pruning of her membership, and a return to the intransigent attitude which characterised her in her earliest days.

That remedy is a counsel of despair, and has proved itself to be that throughout the Church's history. Churches and sects that have restricted their membership to those who profess to have passed through a certain religious experience, segregating themselves from the intellectual and social currents of their age, and regarding the masses outside their membership as separated from them by a gulf which only a cataclysmic act of God can bridge, have failed even to realise the limited ideal of a saintly community. They have invariably and inevitably opened a wide door to hypocrisy and self-deception, marred genuine saintliness by a censorious, grudging spirit, and incurred the final fate of all societies founded on pessimism, a jaundiced view of what is undoubtedly one aspect of the truth betraying them into disintegrating fanaticisms and puerilities. They have always attracted the very

people they were designed to exclude—the false "professors," whom they rightly judge to be more dangerous than worldlings—and died of internal dissolution. No such Church can stand in the long run, because it is founded upon a perversion. The contention of religious pessimism that the world is given over to evil, that the Church is the only ark of refuge, and that Church and world have as little in common as Christ and Belial, has no foundation in reality. There is a world-principle, a worldly spirit and temper, a carnal mind, and a "body of death" against which the Church is sent to wage unceasing warfare—such is the familiar truth of which the theory of an intransigent Church is the pessimistic perversion. But there is also a world which God loves, a world in which His Spirit is working in ways too manifold and subtle to be distinguished by the impatient eye of the censorious sectarian; and since that is so, the Church cannot afford to be on intransigent terms with it. She cannot ignore or despise it without disloyalty to her Lord; she cannot withdraw herself from its intellectual and social struggles without calling that common which God has cleansed. She cannot disclaim her responsibility for those without her pale—a responsibility resting, not upon her superiority to them, but upon her kinship with them—without doing despite to the image of God in man. To her witness, the witness of the Spirit in the world

is a necessary complement and answer. While speaking with an authority derived from her Lord Himself, she must also listen to that same Lord as He speaks with many voices in the world to which she brings His most effectual Word. To take these voices humbly and reverently into account is but to acknowledge that Christ always goes in advance of His heralds; it is but to recognise the prepared soil that the seed may be the more effectual.

The thought of a pure and stainless Church, holy, harmless, and undefiled in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, will never lose its hold upon aspiring souls, for it is entirely valid; but its translation into terms of an exclusive sect is doomed to failure. Pessimism here is a fatal insensitiveness to the hidden hand of Christ in the world. Wherever the working of that Hand is ignored or denied in the alleged interests of a pure Church, there the Gospel is obscured and the Holy One of Israel limited. Such a Church carries the seeds of death within itself. For, in the last resort, a Church lives by its message—using that term, not in the narrow sense of a verbal proclamation merely, but including in it the total witness of its life and work—and the message of an intransigent Church is a fugitive, cloistered, anæmic thing. Like Bel and Nebo of old, its religion has to be laboriously carried, instead of endowing the soul with wings; shielded, where it should be

an impregnable armour. It reminds us of certain pictures of the Flight into Egypt, dear to our early days. They show the grim, perilous wilderness, with a bird of prey hovering like a spot of gold in the merciless blue, and across it, hurrying as fast as their burden would let them, Mary and Joseph with the Child. Mary's mother-agony is in her eyes ; the strain of bitter anxiety furrows the brow of Joseph. The next picture shows them entering a city. Passers-by stop to look at the sleeping Boy, and the Mother's eyes reflect a spasm of apprehension. She hugs the Child close with an almost desperate grip. The sword has entered her heart. In the streets of Heliopolis she sees—a Cross. Which things are a parable of every Church that takes a pessimistic view of its mission. To surround our faith, our creed, our life with a becalmed and relaxing atmosphere of seclusion and timidity is to deplete salt of its savour and light of its illuminating power, to withhold seed from the soil and leaven from the lump. The religion of Jesus Christ is not made for seminaries and spiritual coteries ; its field is the world, and to narrow that field by one furrow is to rob our Lord. It is meant to take its chance against hostile forces as the sunlight against disease. It is equally at home in the gaiety of a village wedding and in the rough-and-tumble of the market-place. It is not afraid of discussion, asks and answers questions, and finds its most

congenial sphere wherever men burst the shackles of religious and social conventions and take big risks. The Church that tries to confine it within the valetudinarian circle of its elect, and to force it into the mould of a narrow and Pharisaical conception of life, will always find itself in the end hugging an empty shell.

## III

In contrast to this conception, yet akin to it because springing from the same root, is what may be called the Roman ideal of the Church—an ideal which has a perennial attraction for weary and disillusionised spirits, and never more so than in times of change and upheaval. It offers a Church, separate indeed from the world, and very proudly and irreconcilably separate, but by no means content to be "lightly by the world esteemed." On the contrary, its aim is to set over against the State an organisation even more massive and compelling, to stir the public imagination where it cannot rule the public conscience, and to impress those whom it fails to convince. In its extreme Ultramontane form, it lives by domination and coercion. Claiming to be conterminous with the Kingdom of God, it counts the whole realm of intellectual achievement its own, seeks to impose its laws upon the nations, and to shape secular policy and use

secular power for its own ends. It constitutes itself the final court of appeal for the State as well as the soul, controls education, creates and directs public opinion, sets its mark of ownership upon every movement that can in any way further its ends, and directs the weapons of popular prejudice and superstition against any movement that seeks other ends, using men and nations alike as pawns in its great game. It is an imposing conception, whose fascination will not wane so long as men grow impatient with the amazing slowness and gentleness of God, and look for a Kingdom "made with hands." It is not confined to Rome, but operates wherever a Church, whether Established or Free, puts its trust in authority and organisation, recognises no interests except its own, relies upon a spectacular programme, and prefers outward unity of creed and action to the free Fellowship of the Redeemed. Nor is it the unscrupulous ambition and un-Christlike temper of many of its leading representatives that constitute the danger of such an ideal. The gentlest and most reasonable application of its principles and methods cannot alter its fundamental opposition to the principles and methods of Christ.

And while it is the ideal of a conquering Church, it is as pessimistic in essence as the ideal of a despised society of saints. It was indeed cradled in pessimism. When, in A.D. 410, the gradual decline of the Roman Empire culminated in the

fall of Rome, despair seized the Church, whose leaders already heard the marauding feet of the Barbarians approaching the Ark of God. Twenty years later, Augustine died while the heathen hordes were clamouring at the gates of Hippo. During the greater part of these twenty years he was occupied in writing his famous "De Civitate Dei"—on the surface a triumph of optimism, in reality a classic of Christian pessimism, if such a contradiction in terms be permissible—speaking with the voice at once of a prophet and of a constructive statesman. The superficial optimism of the book is obvious. Unconquerable must have been the hope of a man who, amid the crash and ruin of the civilisation that had nurtured him, could pen the vision of a City of God planted four-square upon the earth—a heavenly *civitas* set up in the midst of hostile world-powers, limited by no distinction of race, nationality, or culture, comprising the dead as well as the living, destined to triumph over the *civitas hominum.* In the midst of experiences which might well distract the mind and sicken the heart of the strongest, he attempts to justify the ways of God to man, in a stupendous treatise building up stone by stone a massive philosophy of history, conceived with a boldness, breadth, and exhaustless energy of thought that leave one breathless. To have made such an attempt at such a period of the Church's history must surely augur a splendid optimism.

## The Snare of Pessimism

But on a closer view, we realise that it was far otherwise. True, the great classic is dominated by a deathless hope; but it is the hope of the apocalyptic prophet. "De Civitate Dei" is, at bottom, "a tract for bad times"—that is, a work written, not that the bad times may become better, but out of the profound conviction that they are irredeemably bad. In it world-despair seeks to drown itself in Church-consciousness. Its City of God is not the inalienable home of mankind—its home still, however far it may have strayed—but an ark of refuge for such as have received the sovereign and occult grace of God, that they might seek salvation within its walls. Nor was it merely world-despair; it was no less a despair of the Church, in the New Testament sense of the term. No teacher of that time had a clearer vision of the true Church, the free and holy fellowship of believers; but in transferring its prerogatives to the *externa communa*, he virtually surrendered that vision. In that transference the Roman ideal lies involved, however sharply many of its features may conflict with what is most permanently valuable in Augustinianism. For both proceed on the assumption that the world is given over to evil, and that a Church which relies solely upon spiritual means, and seeks to build the Kingdom upon the foundations of love, freedom and knowledge, is too unaggressive and slow to cope with the quick, tough forces that are arrayed against it.

Like its antipode, the conception of a small, elect society, the Roman ideal involves the denial of the soul's innate and indelible affiliation to God—the Christ within every man—and of the Spirit's free working in the world. And the only escape from pessimism, the only reconciling principle that can save us from the vicious dilemma between Church and world, and rescue the Church at once from worldliness and from intransigency, lies in the realisation of the Light that lighteth every man, the Light of the world as well as of the Church. The "New Theology" has brought the doctrine of The Christ Within into discredit by its shallow juggling with moral values, but that fact does not give us any right to ignore it; and we do this now already defunct movement far too much honour if we allow it to drive us into the opposite extreme. Christ is in man. He is in the world. Therefore the Church cannot afford to preserve an attitude of spiritual exclusiveness, let alone of spiritual arrogance. But if Christ is in the human soul and in the world's life, He is there, first of all, as He that convicts of sin. He is there to set the soul, and the world, at war with itself; to create self-criticism where complacency has reigned; to make the calm of self-righteousness into a tempest of remorse, that the flower of penitence might spring from the storm-cleft soil; to be the soul's Accuser as well as its Hope; the world's tormenting Conscience as well as its Inspiration. Once this is

grasped, the Church's attitude to the world becomes clear. By acknowledging the presence and influence of its Lord in the world, the Church will look upon it, not as a hostile country to be attacked by assault, and won by giving no quarter to its citizens, but as a field white unto harvest—the most hopeful thing that ever gladdened the eye of man. By allying itself with its Lord as the world's Conscience and Judge, its optimism will be saved from shallowness and unreality. Its faith in the Christ within man and within the world's life, so far from making it tolerant of the world's evil and low standards, will inspire it with an uncompromising antagonism to worldly principles and methods.

## IV

It is this attitude that is needed to-day, if we are not to be betrayed into a sterile and disintegrating pessimism. With our sense of sin sharpened by the terrible events of our time, we are sorely tempted, on the one hand, to religious fanaticism, and, on the other, to the thought that the Church has failed more completely and finally than a world which is already showing the stirrings of a new spirit. We have among us an increasing number of people who have turned their backs upon the Church, not because of religious indifference, still less of positive

hostility, but in the conviction that it can no longer satisfy the highest spiritual cravings of mankind. Many of them have drifted into Theosophy, New Thought, and similar cults; and among them are so many souls of genuine spiritual quality and fine capacity that it is worse than futile to label them neurotics and cranks. If the Church would meet the needs of the best spirits among them, it must have done with such counsels of despair as either the ideal of a small society of elect believers, delimited by doctrinal tests, or by conformity to a stereotyped form of spiritual experience, or the Roman translation of the world's methods into the language of Catholicism. Only a Church that at once regards the world as the theatre of the Spirit's operation and the site of God's growing Kingdom, and challenges it unflinchingly in the name of that Spirit and in the interests of that Kingdom, can bring Christ to men to-day.

To such a Church, organised in the name of Christ, seeking, not to impress herself upon the world, but only to serve the ends of His Kingdom and to build that Kingdom with the material of His ordering, the test of numbers will not apply. It is constituted wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's name. It is not exclusive. It sets up no external tests, whether of ecclesiastical adherence, which would make it schismatic; or of assent to a creed, which would stamp it as sectarian; or of outward character, which would

rank it with the Pharisees and Scribes against its Master. And though it remains a Church of but two or three, it is still the Church Catholic, the Church victorious. For it embodies a principle of universal application ; it carries within it that which will yet attract to itself uncounted multitudes of the faithful and true, the loyal and loving, until the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

*PART II*

# THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE TO THE NEW AGE

## CHAPTER III

### THE CHURCH AS TEACHER

### I

THE sight of Britain awake after long years of drugging opulence, with the dust of delusion shaken from her eyes, and the joy of sacrifice in her heart—of England awake in her young men and women, who at one fiery touch have cast selfish ease and low contentment from them as worn-out rags, and put on the beautiful garments of dedication—has thrilled our hearts. The enemy little thought that we would enter the lists against perfidy and oppression. He had made sure that we feared him too greatly to run the risk, and were too sorely torn by class and party strife at home, and too weak in face of rebellious elements within the Empire, to be able to present a united and unbroken front. To-day he knows better. The sense of a great and righteous cause overrode at one sweep all counsels of ignoble prudence, and united races, parties, and classes, which but a few weeks before had seemed irreconcilable, into one great brotherhood of fighting men. We may say what we will, and much needs to be said, about the seamy

places in our national life which the war has revealed; one thing towers above all these unveilings of evil—the soul of Britain reborn and transfigured.

And as we ponder this glorious mystery of the nation's awaking from sleep, we are tempted to contrast with it a Church still too complacent and inert. Against the regal background of an Empire vowed to the uttermost risk and sacrifice, she appears languid, self-centered, unmilitant. Instead of unity, we see dismemberment and petty rivalry; instead of brotherhood, a selfish individualism; instead of a great fight, an exasperating preoccupation with small and theoretical issues. Has the Church no enemy to fight, we are tempted to ask, that she can afford to let ungenerous competition and party strife prevail within her borders? Has she no great cause to stand for, no dynamic motive to unite her, no fiery inspiration to goad her to daring? Can the call of Empire accomplish what the call of Christ fails to do? Are the enemies of the Empire more real and threatening than the Enemy of souls? Does the blood that drenched the fair fields of France speak more compelling things than the Blood shed on Calvary? Since the Church has failed to create a spirit of unity, brotherhood, and holy militancy, can she not, at least, submit to have it kindled within her by the example of the Empire?

That there is justification for such questions,

no one would care to deny; but the truth they embody does not go deep enough. Unity, brotherhood, and militancy are certainly needed if the Church is to represent Christ in the new age; but they are not her primary needs. The reiterative insistence with which preachers and writers have dwelt upon her lack of corporate life and of the warrior spirit has set sensitive souls on edge with a poignant, if inarticulate, dissatisfaction and longing; but no amount of urging can avail to change the secondary character of things that are secondary. The fundamental need of the Church is something other and deeper than any or all of these three things; and until we recognise the primary, our insistence upon the secondary will remain little more than a blind demand, expressing a genuine need, but utterly impotent to meet it. It is our insight into the great primal needs that alone can give these derivatives their vital content. The Empire was not welded into a great, united fighting force by saying, "Our supreme need is unity, brotherhood, and militancy; go to, let us be united and brotherly and militant." What united us was the clear recognition of a common foe and—what is far more to the point—the power of a great ideal. It is not so much what we are fighting *against* as what we are fighting *for* that nerves Britain with a moral and spiritual force to which but yesterday she seemed a stranger. It is the vision of the Britain that

is to be, of the world as God intended it, that unites her sons to-day in bonds purer and stronger far than any which the mere consciousness of a common foe can forge. Indeed, if we rightly measure the malignity of the foe, it is only in the light of the ideal against which he has launched his forces.

And this is even more true of the Church. Unity, corporateness, and the passion of the happy warrior are not self-contained entities that can be aimed at for their own sakes. They are of value precisely in proportion to the value of the cause or impulse which created them. Our enemies were also a united force; they also were resolved to fling their all into the furnace, and to fight to the death. If union, comradeship, and fighting courage were to be coveted in themselves, apart from moral values, many an association of crooks and criminals could give both Church and Empire "points." This is sufficiently obvious, yet it needs to be emphasised at a time when these qualities are worshipped with so blind a fervour, and when an impatient public is saying to the Churches, "Look at the Empire! Why, in the name of religion, can't *you* show the same spirit?"

The Churches, always too easily reduced to an apologetic attitude by popular criticism, have taken up the challenge, and are initiating a crusade for reunion, the revival of the corporate life, and a new programme of spiritual warfare.

## The Church as Teacher

This crusade is to-day being preached from almost every influential pulpit, and cannot fail to stir the hearer who has the cause of Christianity at heart. But the time has come when we need to ask ourselves certain preliminary questions. We are bidden to unite ; have we really grasped that which we are to unite upon ? We are exhorted to brotherliness ; have we a clear conception of the basis and characteristic quality of Christian brotherhood ? We are called to enlist in a holy war ; do we really know, with a vital and experimental knowledge, what it is that we are to fight for ? These are the merest commonplaces, but we have wandered away so far from the region of reality to which they belong that their very homeliness seems startling. We have for so long been urged to unite and fight against this and that enemy that we have tended to live upon negatives, and forgotten that what is of primary importance is not our recognition of the enemy, but the vision of our Captain. We are constantly being told that the Church is too indifferent to moral perils, and too little indignant against moral evil. But what the Church has first and foremost to be alarmed about is not the outbreaks of evil that shock society every now and then, but her own slender grasp upon the sources of moral renewal, her attenuated understanding of the Gospel committed to her, and the poverty of her experience of Christ.

## II

It comes to this—that the first concern of the Church at any and every time must be her message. She is not here primarily to fight against opposing forces, whether by way of defensive or by way of offensive, but to build a Kingdom. She is, so to speak, a great colonising power. Whatever warfare she may have to wage—and the true Church is always, to some extent, a fighting Church—is only incidental to her great constructive mission. The questions she needs to ask at every stage, and never more stringently than in this day of crisis, are : " Have we grasped the nature of the Kingdom of God? Are we building it with the right materials? Do we really *know* that for which we stand, and do we know it in such a way as to be able to interpret it to the mind of the age ? " To insist upon this is not to take an intellectualistic view of the Church's function : it is rather to demand that her faith should be " full of eyes," her love radiant with intelligence, her will backed by insight, her aspirations informed with a positive content. Knowledge of the truth and faithfulness to the truth *may* be a dry and barren business out of all relation to life—it entirely depends on what is understood by " truth." The truth we are concerned with is also a way and a life. It is a truth which demands the most perfect con-

currence of the intellect, emotions, and will for its apprehension. To know it is to have eternal life; to be faithful to it is life abundant. It is intellectual enough to give birth to philosophies and theologies which leave the mind breathless on the utmost edge of thought; yet it is too vital to be confined within the bounds of any system, and can be grasped only in the passionate experience of the soul that loves and dares.

None the less, the understanding has a certain inalienable primacy in the Christian conception of truth. It does not come first in order of time, but it gives that which does come first its full content, significance, and power. It makes the Gospel—the good news from God—influential over the whole area of life and knowledge, where otherwise it would remain a remedial measure for moral infirmity, by grasping it as the truth of God. The pragmatic conception of things which has for nearly a generation impoverished our life and crippled our thought has left us all but incapable of estimating and using truth. It has identified truth with mere theory, and then opposed to it the conveniently vague idea of "life." Within the Church it has produced a type of fervent personal devotion to Christ coupled with not merely ignorance of, but positive unconcern as to, the meaning and import of His teaching. Whenever an attempt is made to advocate a more serious and thoroughgoing contemplation of Divine reality, one is met by

the objection that a loving heart is more important than a correct intellectual apprehension of Christianity, and that the man who does the will of God is more highly to be esteemed than the man of vision. Such a conception as that of being sanctified or hallowed *in the truth*, with all its vital suggestions and implications, is largely alien to the prevailing temper.

Herein is one great cause of the Church's present weakness. In our reaction against intellectualism and the tyranny of the theologian in the interests of the spiritual life, we have tended to forget that life is everywhere blind and inarticulate except as it is lived under the power of truth. We lament our lack of "moral and spiritual dynamic," and, as a rule, we mean nothing more by the term than a great uprush of emotion often resulting in spectacular action. What we really and supremely need is the dynamic of a clear, steady, spacious vision, and of a disciplined, progressive apprehension of the truth.

Much has been said concerning the astounding vagueness and crudeness of the religious conceptions of the great masses of men outside the Churches. The religion of the average Englishman is still a bald and depressing Deism, which under the pressure of anguish either breaks down into sheer superstition, or is swamped by the returning faith of childhood. But what is far more significant is the vagueness and crudeness of the conceptions held by large numbers within

the Churches. It is not the instruction of those outside, but the Christianisation—no other term is adequate—of the faith and thought of the average Church member that constitutes our most immediate problem. Under the grim inquisition of war, the secrets of many hearts have been revealed. Sorrow has unlocked lips that long kept silence concerning God, and bitter perplexity has forced the pent-up doubts of a lifetime into the open. On every hand one is confronted with tragic eclipses of faith—tragic, not on account of the obscuring cloud, but rather because of the pathetic flimsiness of the faith thus obscured. The most poignantly significant thing about the self-revelations of anguished souls that the war has extorted is their unveiling of the non-Christian character of the faith of a large proportion of Church members. Its slender hold on Christian doctrine as distinguished from passively or superstitiously accepted dogma, its preponderantly sentimental character, and its extraordinary ignorance of the implications of the Gospel conspire to make it an exceedingly frail and brittle thing, vulnerable to the lightest touch of contradiction. Beneath a thin crust of unthinkingly-accepted Christianity, it presents a medley of pagan, Jewish and mediæval conceptions. It includes Christ as a piece of theological machinery, but owes little to His influence as a living Redeemer. The most deep-going disillusionment which these days have brought

to religious teachers and leaders is the discovery that ideas which they deemed dead and done with live on as the material of popular faith, and are surprisingly influential even with those who have spent all their lives under the teaching of the Church. Whatever Deity they really and profoundly believe in, as distinct from the Deity they pay conventional homage to in church, it is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The whole religious situation of to-day is a witness to the poverty and shallowness of our knowledge of God. Traditional conceptions have broken down, and in our reaction against a conception of Christianity which transformed the religion of Redemption into a speculative system, our interest has shifted from theology to psychology. Until, under the pressure of a world-tragedy, the question, *What is God really like?* swallowed up all other questions, we were far more concerned with the soul than with its Creator, and our eager investigations of the phenomena of religious experience covered an ignorance of, and, one is afraid, an indifference to, its Object that are bearing disastrous fruit.

## III

Nowhere does this come to the surface more strikingly than in the place where we least think of looking for it—the realm of public worship.

Worship, public or private, has largely come to be a thin and casual affair, empty alike of intellectual gravity and spiritual passion ; a salutary custom, indeed, but not to be mentioned in one breath with the obligation to social service. Characterised often by sheer slovenliness, it lacks, even in its most punctilious observance, the fiery edge and constraining beauty of minds irradiated by the splendour of truth and hearts subdued by Divine mysteries. Seldom does it exhibit the wonder of wide-eyed faith ; hardly ever does it run up into eternity. It barely touches the fringe of life ; its solemnities appear trivial beside the grim facts of existence. And the root-cause of this impotence is a vague, uninformed, shallow conception of God. This emerges especially in prayer, where the thought of God should exercise its most formative influence. Most of our prayers—even in public worship—are occupied with our own moods, our own needs, whether spiritual or temporal, rather than with God. How much of them is taken up with self-analysis and self-commiseration, with the recital of our struggles and the formulation of our doubts ! As we pass our prayer-life under review, we are shamed by its colossal egotism. Man, not God, is in the forefront. With all our talk about "getting into tune with the Infinite," "practising the Presence of God," or however our theological dialect may phrase it, and with all our enlarged conceptions

of the dignity and wonder of life, we tend to make God a purveyor instead of a judge, a means instead of an end.

These strictures seem to suggest the egoistic and essentially materialistic tendency of "New Thought," which seeks to use spiritual forces as a means of gaining material ends; or else the crude conception of prayer, so slow to die even among intelligent folk, according to which we can secure any object on which our heart is set, provided only we pray long enough and vehemently enough. But what one has in mind is a far subtler tendency, and one which has naturalised itself within the Church to an alarming degree—the impulse which uses prayer, both vocal and silent, as a means for attaining calm of soul, spiritual poise, a sense of mastery over life. This cult of power is not new. It is as old as Christianity, taking different forms in each successive age. And not one of the least significant things about it is that while it is promoted in the interests of a higher ethic than that of the average believer, history has abundantly proved that it almost invariably ends in producing a lower ethic. This is not to be wondered at, for it is rooted in a false and unworthy thought of God. It presupposes a Deity who exists mainly for the spiritual self-aggrandisement of His creatures; who is, in fact, the great means of their self-culture—one might almost say, the apparatus for their religious gymnastics. To

urge that the self-enlargement sought is spiritual, and that it is coveted for the sake of the world, does not mend matters. It is merely a new version of the old fallacy that it does not matter how a man's wealth is gained, so long as his personal tastes are refined, and he contributes largely to charity.

It has been argued that the essentially selfish and self-bounded character of much of our worship is the fruit of Protestant individualism and intellectualism. Protestantism, it is urged, has so exaggerated the importance of preaching as to reduce the devotional element to the level of mere "preliminaries," and laid so one-sided an emphasis upon the subjective needs of the individual as to breed a fatal self-absorption which has no eyes for God. The one and only remedy for such a perverted religious consciousness is to be found in the restoration of the Sacrament to its rightful place at the centre of Christian worship. We must once more come to know the Lord in the breaking of bread. At the heart of the Gospel is not the acceptance of a message from God, but the self-giving of God; and we appropriate the Gospel, not when we accept a doctrine, but when we have communion with the broken Body of Christ.

But while there is a profound truth in this view, it offers neither a correct diagnosis nor a complete remedy. The fundamental cause of our inadequate worship is neither intellectualism

nor individualism, though both have contributed to its enfeebling, but simply an inadequate thought of God. Worship is adoration and devotion, but it does not live by mere adoration and devotion; it feeds and grows upon the worshipper's enlarging apprehension of the truth. No mere emotional fervour, no blind sacramental communion, can take the place of a mind stretching towards the truth, and thus being purified to moral penetration, disciplined to intellectual gravity, kindled to spiritual splendour. "No Gospel, no Mass" is the fundamental axiom of all true worship. Communion which is not communion with Him who opens all Scriptures and feeds the growing soul of discipleship with words of eternal life is sheer superstition.

This does not imply, of course, that worship is an intellectual exercise, or that the prophetic function of the inspired mind is of more account than the priestly consecration of the devoted soul. Worship is not vision merely, but self-oblation—the presenting of body and soul as a pure sacrifice. Yet it is the soul's deepening insight into truth translated into holy living that gives that sacrifice its character and value. It is only as penetrated and irradiated by the active spiritual intelligence that our self-oblation is indeed an offering of our integral and undivided personality, and not merely the surface movement of emotional surrender. If the Protestant pulpit

of to-day* has tended to weaken the devotional impulse and to depress worship, it is not because it has unduly exalted the function of the intellect in religion, but, on the contrary, because it has largely failed to give religious feeling a positive and coherent content. It has tended to dwell upon the minor moods and tenses of religious experience, to minister to the temperamental impressionism of the age instead of to its spiritual needs, to take the idiosyncrasies of the soul too seriously and the principles of the Gospel not seriously enough. To so large an extent, indeed, has the pulpit abdicated its teaching function that it is possible for a man to hear one-hundred-and-four sermons a year, and yet remain pathetically ignorant of the great doctrines of Christianity in their deeper aspects and implications. When James Smetham finds it possible to write, "I know no more intellectually of the truth to-day than when I first believed," and to acquiesce with entire equanimity in his arrested development, the fact that he was none the less a beautiful and devout soul may obscure, but does not lessen by one iota, the tragedy of such a confession. And whatever may be true of individuals here and there, worship on the large scale must either harden to formality or soften to blind senti-

* No doubt the Protestant pulpit of the past was characterised by a dry and intellectualistic orthodoxy, but English Protestantism remained largely immune from an influence which sapped the very life of the Continental Protestant Churches.

mentalism, unless it is nourished by a true and expanding thought of God.

Moreover, a true conception of God involves a due emphasis upon the rights of human personality. The weakness of popular Protestant teaching is not, as its critics seem to think, that it has over-emphasised the claims of personality, but that it has laid a disproportionate emphasis upon the individual's right to judge for himself, and upon his craving for spiritual comfort and happiness. The result has been an attitude of religious self-obsession — a type of mind that accepts nothing which does not minister to its emotional craving, and is almost incapable of anything like steady reflection upon objective reality. Again, the remedy is not a correspondingly one-sided insistence upon adoration and devotion, whether expressed in sacramental worship or not, but a truer doctrine of God and of human personality in relation to God. It is not insignificant that the book dealing with religious problems of the hour which pleads most insistently for a restoration of the Eucharist to its central place in Christian worship, also asserts with unqualified emphasis that one great reason for the alienation of the masses of men from Christianity is due to the failure of the Church *as a teaching institution*. In that volume, "The Church in the Furnace," seventeen Anglican chaplains, expressing their minds with wholesome frankness, bear cumulative witness to the

tragedy of a Church that has ceased to teach and enlighten. With Germany to brand it in upon our reluctant minds that ideas are not harmless arm-chair amusements, but moral dynamite, dare we doubt any longer that the prophet spoke truly when he cried, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

## IV

The supreme need of the ministry to-day is to recover its teaching function. Two generations ago the man in the pew received an astonishing amount of solid religious instruction from the pulpit. We are far too ready to smile at the exceeding "stodginess" of matter and pomposity of manner which characterised this instruction, and to take it for granted that its result was merely an intellectual assent having no deep influence upon the hearer's life. Both these strictures are superficial. What sounds tedious and magniloquent to us came with living power to the men of an earlier generation, and while many aspects of the Gospel—chiefly its social implications—were not understood by them, what was understood exercised a profound influence upon life and conduct within its own range. We may marvel at the narrowness and dogmatism of Victorian religion, but there is no foundation whatever for asserting that the

Victorian Church member failed "to live up to his lights." On the contrary, everything goes to show that the teaching received and assimilated by him, however defective, and in some ways frankly repellent, entered the very fibre of his being, with the result that, in spite of his primness and complacency, his demure love of comfort, and his exasperating acquiescence in the things that are, he lived under the power of his consciousness of God as many of us do not, and had a sense of responsibility and stewardship which this age of social enthusiasms curiously lacks.

To-day we have exhausted the fund of religious knowledge which former generations have bequeathed to us. The theological terminology of a past age has lost its meaning for us; its formulæ have, to a considerable extent, ceased to be adequate to our understanding of ultimate reality. The neatness and finality of its definitions repel us; its exclusion of whole tracts of life that we have learnt to think of as sacred fills us with amazement. Moreover, in our revulsion from a barrenly intellectualistic attitude, we have come to minimise the importance of a teaching ministry. We like to remind ourselves that Christianity cannot be taught like arithmetic; that it is a Divine touch, the motion of the wind that bloweth where it listeth; an attitude, a life. We do not want to be instructed from the pulpit; we want to be impressed and appealed to; we want the preacher to create an

atmosphere, to wield the magic wand of spiritual evocation. We do not want so much to understand as to experience—to feel the touch of God upon our souls; to know, in the region where words fail, that we are one with Him. We are weary of the exasperating logomachies, the unhelpful antiquarianism of doctrinal discussion. We long for movement, colour, dynamic life. We are impatient even of the great mystical doctrines, for, after all, religion as an intense inward experience is not possible to every man; religion in that sense is surely "a matter of temperament, like a taste for music—or for mustard." But to find God in the rhythm of common life, to see Him in the brother whom we help and love, to feel His Spirit pulsing through the great movements of the age—that is open to all. What we need is not professors of theology in the pulpit, but prophets of the spiritual impulse, seers who will teach us how to discern the Way of God in the ways of contemporary history; mystics, if you will, but practical mystics, who will show us the sacramental value of Borough Councils and Welfare Committees.

The truth of all this need not be especially emphasised at this late day. Christianity is obviously not a theological system, a neat "plan of salvation," but an experience involving the whole personality and revolutionising a man's social relations as well as his personal conduct. But we do not experience Christianity by simply

stating with reiterative emphasis that it is an experience and not a creed, and it sometimes looks as if there were less rather than more genuine first-hand Christian experience among us since we began to concentrate upon "the religion of experience." With all our insistence upon the vital character of Christianity, we are not producing a conspicuously large number of vital Christian personalities. Our emergence from a conventional observance of religion has thinned the ranks of our Church membership, but it has not made those that remain within the Church more whole-heartedly Christian; on the contrary, our spiritual proletariat has never been larger in proportion to our total Church membership than it is to-day. Every Church can show multitudes of excellent men and women open to religious impressions, eager to serve along institutional lines, always ready to give and help, but lacking definite spiritual personality. They are most lovable, as a rule; their immunity from priggishness and Pharisaism is a relief after the hardness and self-consciousness of the conventionally spiritual, and they abound in the most hopeful possibilities. But, *in their present condition*, they are not spiritual entities; and unless they are helped to their legitimate development, they will end in religious sub-normality, in chronic minority.

The reason for this is not far to seek. In belittling the need of teaching, we are depriving

ourselves of the very factor by which our experience of Christianity is lifted above the mists of mere feeling. As we have reminded ourselves already, experience is little more than an instinct, or a fleeting mood, unless reflected upon and interpreted by the reason. And further, experience presupposes knowledge to a far greater extent than we are prepared to admit. It was not for nothing that Jesus taught His disciples daily for three years before He died and rose again ; it is not for nothing that the Holy Spirit is conceived of as imparting the things Christ has yet to say to His disciples. While experience can come, and has come again and again, to untaught souls, that articulated body of experience which makes the complete man in Christ Jesus cannot come in its most vitally influential power without a basis of knowledge. Much of what we call experience is nothing else than the sudden vitalising of latent knowledge mechanically absorbed and unconsciously retained. We need to realise how much we owe to that uncritical and quasi-mechanical acceptance of traditional religious knowledge which set us free to turn our attention to the new impulses and tasks of a later day.* All the time, while we

* Dr. Hort deals with this point in his classic treatise, " The Way, the Truth, the Life," pp. 86-88. The whole chapter is pre-eminently worth reading in this connection. Dr. Hort shows in inimitable fashion how, in the apprehension of the Gospel *as truth*, an endless future is opened for all knowledge and all devotion.

turned from the theological aspect of Christianity to enter more deeply into its practical implications, we were being unconsciously nourished on our inherited store of knowledge. That inheritance is failing us to-day. And unless we replace it by a newly-won intellectual grasp and formulation of our deepest religious convictions, which shall impose upon us a discipline as severe and educative as that which traditional forms of belief imposed upon our fathers, we shall surely lose our souls in the name of freedom.

The present-day pulpit, where it has been alive to the tremendous issues of the hour, has tended, to a considerable extent, to substitute a ministry of censure for a ministry of teaching. Exhortation mingled with reproach has become the keynote of preaching in not a few quarters, and only too often it reduces itself to a demand to make bricks without straw. Thus, for instance, we are incessantly exhorted to a more passionate and adventurous religious attitude. If patriotism can evoke so heroic a passion, ought not the call of Christ to win at least as intense a response ?

That Christ can indeed kindle the soul to a passion beside which the flame of patriotism pales to a shadow is graven deep upon the Church's records. But as one listens to these reiterative demands for spiritual passion, one is haunted by the uncomfortable suspicion that even the low degree of fervour and zeal found

in the Church to-day has not sufficient reality behind it, *is not sufficiently rooted in vital knowledge* to justify it as an authentic movement of the soul.

What does the average church-goer really know of Christ as One who re-creates the soul at its central depth; to what extent has he entered into the purposes of the Kingdom; what grasp has he of the world-wide sweep and the intimate workings of redeeming Love that could create an increase of genuine passion as distinct from mere nervous emotion?

It is not theological knowledge that is in question here, but *the deep pondering of the heart that loves.* It is experience in its fullest sense that is needed—experience which includes an ever-deepening insight into the mind of Christ, a feeding of the spiritual intelligence upon His words of eternal life. It is this deeper and more truly experimental penetration into the secret of Christianity that needs to be preached to-day. To stir men to their crying need of that grasp upon reality which creates passion for Christ's cause, and so passion for all great causes, is the preacher's task. The mere exhortation to be more passionate only serves to obscure this need, and in the long run produces an amazing bluntness and indifference. The pulpit that abdicates its teaching function to-day is on the way to kill the ideals it most strenuously advocates. To teach, in the fullest sense of that term, leading

people into the truth and not merely describing the outward vesture of truth; to teach with the combined fearlessness and awe of those who dare to trust the Spirit's present guidance, is the only salvation of the pulpit. A blind faith that can give no account of itself, a rootless emotion that fails in the face of grim realities, a mindless enthusiasm for something that remains unknown through sheer mental indolence—these things are fully as disastrous as a conventionally accepted theology. The preacher who can teach experimentally, *i.e.*, who can present his thought as the living product of his own experience, will meet with a response that will astonish him.

---

## NOTE

SINCE this chapter was in type, the Archbishops' First Committee of Inquiry has issued its Report on "The Teaching Office of the Church"—a document profoundly significant both as a frank confession of failure and as a call to immediate and radical action. In its insistence upon the intellectual element in the Church's message, and upon the need for presenting that message in terms of current thought, it corroborates all that has been said above on this point. It specially emphasises the intellectual weakness and defective training of the clergy as a primary cause of the Church's failure as a teacher; demands that the training for the ministry be made the concern of the Church as a whole, and a first charge upon her revenues; and makes definite practical

recommendations towards securing a higher standard of ministerial competence. In this emphasis many see the most important feature of the Report; but it should be borne in mind that, as a point of fact, some of the Free Churches have already a standard of training equal to, and, in the case of the Presbyterian Churches, greatly in advance of, that suggested in the Committee's recommendations, and that yet they too have lost heavily within the last decade. After all, our primary concern to-day is with the contents of the Church's message rather than with the method of conveying it; and our first task is to determine afresh what that message really is, to re-think it in the light of a new day, and to re-appropriate it experimentally.

It is when the Committee turns its attention to theological reconstruction that its utterances seem to us of prime importance. In dealing with the question of "Examination for Ordination" they pass the present Examination Syllabus under stringent review. They point out that the Thirty-nine Articles, which, with the Creeds, form the subject-matter of the present examination in theology, have nothing to say concerning "the great truths of the Divine Fatherhood, of God's immanence and transcendence, of His eternal purpose for the world, and of the Kingdom for whose establishment He calls us to cooperate with Him." They begin with the doctrine of Original Sin; of the fact of actual sin they have little to say; of man's original glorious nature in the image of God, nothing. They reveal nothing of the mind and heart of God towards us, reducing the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to "a kind of moral connoisseur." The result is, as one clergyman put it, that "there are a good many people who believe in the Blessed Sacrament, but do not believe in Almighty God." The Report also lays emphasis upon the neglect of the subject of Christian morals—a neglect easily accounted for by the Church's weak grasp upon the

doctrines upon which Christian morals are based. It reminds us that the attack upon Christianity is to-day passing from doctrine to morals, and that " while such old standard books as Pearson's " Exposition of the Creed," and Nelson's " Fasts and Festivals," made a real effort to exhibit the moral bearings of Christian truth; those which have taken their place do not." The whole Report is one powerful, cumulative, convincing plea for that new thought of God with which Chapter IV. of this book attempts to deal.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Need for a New Thought of God

### I

Behind the languor of present-day religious life is the lack of a new thought of God—a profound, creative conception that shall weld our fragmentary experience into a coherent and intelligible whole. That new experience has been granted us we dare not doubt. We have touched God at points at which a former generation would have deemed it impious to look for Him, gained insights into His purposes which re-created our world and gave a new spaciousness to life, realised our corporate relation to Him as the ages of individualism could not do. Yet, with all this spiritual wealth, we lack a deep, true thought of God; and the reason is not far to seek. While we are eager to touch life at every point, while large numbers are anxious to make contact with that spiritual world of which they are increasingly convinced, we largely lack any intense and impelling longing to know God as a Person; to know Him intimately, profoundly, and at first-hand; to apprehend Him as well as to feel Him; to know Him with the understanding

and not merely with the religious instincts. It was this longing which drove men of old, not merely to live in the light that shames and purifies, but also to think deeply, patiently, yea, passionately, until out of this interaction of gnosis and praxis, this rubbing together of life and action out of which all true fire and light proceed, there came thoughts of God that moulded the lives of Churches and nations and created mighty world-movements.

All through history there have been drab and arid periods in which man's longing for God grew faint and dim. Between the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival there stretched such an arid desert; and when the hand of Wesley rekindled fires that had all but died out, it did not wholly restore what had been lost. It brought back the warm emotion of the heart that cannot rest until it has found the eternal Heart of Love; it did not bring back the passion of the mind that craves to apprehend the Infinite Mind. In its reaction from a rationalistic conception of Christianity, it tended to disparage the function of reason in man's experience of God. It produced great experimentalists—men who spoke with authority, as those who knew with a knowledge so immediate and unshakable as to put it beyond the pale of argument—but it did not produce great thinkers. Its roll of honour includes no names like those which made the massive race of Puritan divines illustrious, no men who

were at once speculative thinkers and profound psychologists of the Christian experience. It may, in fact, be said to mark the starting-point of that reaction against intellectualism which, especially when in Hegel intellectualism spoke its last word, tended to make experience entirely emotional and to conceive of thought as divorced from life. By the time of Kingsley and Maurice, people in general had lost that interest in theological thought which gave the Puritan pulpit so matchless an opportunity, and theologians were, on the whole, strangely devoid of experimental interest. With Ritschl that interest came into its own again; but Ritschlianism, in fighting against a metaphysical theology, opposed to it, on the one hand, a philosophical scepticism, and, on the other, a narrow and dogmatic historicity which could not survive criticism. It had no psychology of the Christian experience, and calmly relegated the soul's immediate certainties to the realm of mysticism, by which was understood something purely subjective, if not actually pathological.

For the past fifty years there has been much discussion as to the nature of God, but little genuine thinking. Popular apologetics has remained, to a large though decreasing extent, a matter of cheap argument and smart retort. Men have been more or less interested in God, and more or less curious about Him; but of a consuming desire to know Him and hold com-

munion with Him there has been comparatively little. Even in religiously-inclined circles, a superficial spiritual eagerness conceals a poverty of dynamic desire. Everyone wishes to know God a little, but few take pains to know Him much; and while spiritual phenomena are eagerly investigated, their Source is neglected. The great wave of humanism which has captured religious souls has shown the inhumanness of certain current conceptions of God, the meanness of the common idea of divinity as compared to the nobility of man. Briefly, our vision has been sharpened, and we are becoming adepts at criticising defective views of God; but we still lack that passion for God, that overmastering sense of our need of Him and our affiliation to Him, which will drive us to re-think our conception of Him with all the energy of brain and soul of which we are capable.

We have seen how in our very acts of worship our lack of real contact with God is apparent, how even the most spiritual are dogged by the temptation to make God the means and their perfecting the end. There is no escape from this except by sinking ever more deeply into the thought of God. We must at all costs have a God who so smites us with a sense of His majesty, beauty, and surpassing wonder, that, so far from presuming to use Him, we shall scarcely dare ask Him to use us. We need a God who so loves men, and so sorrows with and suffers for them,

that at the sight of such love our selfishness dies within us, and even the thought of our most spiritual self is lost in a consuming desire to give Him love for love. We need a God whose purposes towards ourselves and the world are so stupendous that, as we begin to apprehend something of their length and breadth and depth and height, we tread our own small plans—even our plans for the good of others—under foot, and humbly offer ourselves to Him for the building of His Kingdom. We need, in short, a God who possesses and masters us. And if our thought of God is so to possess and sway our deepest heart, it must be beaten out on the anvil of the mind. No swiftness of insight or leaping flame of emotion can absolve the intellect from its task. We need a conception of God as philosophic as that of the Greek Fathers, as mighty as that of the Reformers and Puritans, and as ethically searching as a new social consciousness can make it.

## II

How are we to arrive at such a conception? Already that shallow curiosity about the spiritual world which has killed all true thinking is giving place here and there to a new wistfulness, and, what is more, to a new teachableness. Men are far more ready now than they were five years ago to listen to the teacher or community that

can give them a new thought of God. What have we to say to them? Our first step clearly must be to disentangle the specifically and fundamentally Christian conception of God from the accretions that have gathered round it, and the modifications which have improved it out of existence. Certain old and very simple lines of thought, familiar to some of us since our school-days, may serve as a guiding thread through a labyrinth of overlapping presentations, and recall us to the material out of which a constructive conception of God must be built.

In this old and very effective system of meditation we were invited to picture an average individual—just a common, insignificant man or woman, without any charm or distinction, and with a thousand irritating and unlovely qualities. We were told to consider such an individual in relation to nature and to the race; what is he but the merest speck upon the landscape, so insignificant, so irrelevant, that it takes an effort to become aware of his presence at all? Yet, difficult though it be to believe, he is a person of tremendous importance. Three stupendous facts conspire to give him a dignity which kings might envy. To begin with, he is the object of his Creator's love—of a love as distinct and individual as though he were the only being in the universe. God does not merely value him as a pawn in the game—a cog, small yet indispensable, in the machinery of the universe; He values

him as something altogether unique, something to be ardently coveted and supremely prized. Upon him the Everlasting Love is fastened with a brooding tenderness of which the love of a lover for his beloved is but a faint shadow. Upon him the Eternal Mind is concentrated with a solicitude we cannot measure. Not all the respect paid to the great ones of earth is comparable for a moment to the reverence of the Creator for this most poor and commonplace of creatures.

That is one great fact woven deep into the very texture of Christianity; but there is more than that. About this insignificant person there is an attraction so powerful that it imposed a law of gravitation upon Heaven, and drew Eternal Love down to itself. The hidden potentialities of that frail, unsteady, wayward human heart, the unseen beauty of that warped and blemished soul, were as fuel of fire to the burning heart of the Saviour. He was created for Jesus, predestinated to the splendour of the hidden life in Christ; and thus his weakness and need knocked irresistibly upon the door of Heaven, and helped to transfigure the earth with the glorious mystery of the Incarnation. He lives in a redeemed world. The discriminative love of Jesus has flung its dewy splendour about his sordidness; the eye of Jesus has looked upon him till his own eye reflects a faint shadow of that look; the hand of Jesus has touched him and left a trail of glory where it rested.

And yet a third lustre wraps him round. If Christianity is true, then the God who so wondrously made him, and who is waiting to remake him yet more wondrously, has a distinct intention and plan for him. He has an inalienable place in the mighty purposes of Heaven. As an individual, a citizen, a member of the Body of Christ, there is a work for him to do which no other man, nor all men taken together, can do. It is his peculiar dignity, his only happiness, to give to God a love and a worship which no other can give should he refuse it. In creating him, God gave him his own share in the eternal destiny; who dare set a limit to the momentous interests extending far beyond the scope of his individual life which depend upon his free self-dedication to his Creator? And as on earth he has his own unique work and value for God, so he has his own place in the life beyond. For him there waits, if he be true to his divine calling, a crown of individual splendour and characteristic loveliness, destined to make its own irreplaceable contribution to the glory of the City of God.

These are tremendous assumptions, and it takes a tremendous faith to preach them; yet they belong to the essence of the Christian Gospel, and to weaken them by one iota is to fail of our trust. We are ashamed to think how largely we have failed in this matter. A meretricious apologetic and a spurious liberalism—now finally

vanished, one would hope, in the shaking of things that can be shaken—have betrayed us into preaching Christianity as if it were merely a sympathetic and religious way of expressing the moral and social ideals of the best thinkers. But we are once more coming to see that the Christian Gospel, while it is the source of all these ideals, is something other than they, and that its great differentiating factor is simply the love of God to men. The Christian doctrine that God loves us and desires our love is not a figure of speech —a romantic version of the thesis that God cares for the race, appreciates each individual as a contributing factor in its development, and makes certain ethical demands upon him. It means precisely what it says. It announces in the face of a thousand screaming contradictions that God loves men and expects men to believe it. And once a man does believe it, he may succeed in getting rid of the miraculous, but he will not be likely to object to it on the score of its difficulty. Beside the one stupendous doctrine of the love of God all other doctrines appear credible. What can be more simple and elementary, what more sublime and regenerative, than a childlike faith in the loving fatherhood of God? Yet the moment we say the great words, *God is love*, with meaning and intensity, we find ourselves caught in a grim conflict of soul, compared to which our dogmatic difficulties are mere child's-play.

Here, then, is the centre, the inmost heart, of the Christian conception of God. There are many forms of heterodoxy, but there is ultimately only one heresy—the weakening or denial of the doctrine of the love of God. To re-think our thought of God must therefore mean, first and foremost, to sink more deeply into that doctrine, and to realise more clearly its tremendous implications. What does it mean in the light of our deepest religious experience? How does it present itself when we have exercised our best intelligence upon it? How can we best restate it in consonance with present-day needs, and in forms most readily assimilated by the mind of to-day? This is not an abstract intellectual exercise, but a most uncomfortably practical inquiry. One need not ponder this great doctrine very long or deeply before coming to the melancholy conviction that the Church's corporate life and organisation are not based upon a profound, unequivocal faith in the love of God, but, on the contrary, upon a compromise between that doctrine and the world's scale of values which is more fatal by far than its direct negation. One need only think of the fact that, as a pungent critic phrased it, "there is more grief in Church circles over one rich man that departeth than over ninety-and-nine poor persons who never come near the Church," in order to realise the force of this assertion. Nor need we imagine that the preaching of what is called a social

doctrine will mend matters. The social doctrine promulgated by Trades Unionists is sufficiently democratic; yet Trades Unions, as one knows them, are not one whit ahead of the Churches in adopting a hospitable and understanding attitude towards the classes not included in their membership, whether it be the capitalist class or the ranks of casual labour. If the truth were told, they are several degrees more class-conscious and exclusive than even the most complacent Churches. There is only one thing that can save the Church of Christ from its entanglement with anti-social interests—a new thought of God as loving men with a love so individual and compassionate that beside it a mother's love shows rough edges, and so exacting that the meticulous discipline of Christian monk or Hindu ascetic seems poor and trivial beside the strength of its consuming fire, the rigour of its inexorable inquisition. To think through this conception till its remotest implications become apparent and compelling is the Christian teacher's first duty.

## III

To say that our supreme need is to think of God in terms of Jesus Christ and His Cross is to utter one of those commonplaces of Christian teaching which we took for granted, until the war revealed the fact that it had never been really accepted

by the great mass of Christian people. When anguished souls cried out that they could no longer believe in a God who permits such a hell of cruelty and slaughter, they were implying a doctrine of the Divine Omnipotence expressed in terms of nature and brute force, not in terms of love and grace. The popular doctrine of God is theistic (where it is not crassly deistic) rather than Christian ; it does not go to Jesus for its definition of omnipotence. The average man, even where he refuses to admit it, conceives of the Incarnation as a suspension of God's omnipotence in favour of His love. He believes in the omnipotence of love on the human plane, and after a sentimental fashion. He believes it may triumph in the realm of family affection, but cannot conceive of its application to the life of nations. He admits it to be the strength of a mother's heart, but assumes it to be something of an amiable weakness in God. He has yet to learn that the only doctrine of God's omnipotence that is tenable in face of life's grim realities finds expression in Christ. In Him we see God giving up His well-beloved Son to a life of suffering and a death of shame, not in spite of His omnipotence, but because He is omnipotent with the omnipotence of love that can suffer to the death and still remain love. His is an omnipotence that triumphs in endurance, subjugates men by suffering dumbly at their hands, and delivers its own by sharing their afflictions. How many of the distracting

doubts born of a desperate world-situation would survive if we defined the power of God in terms of Jesus? It is surely significant that, with the exception of one brilliant attempt,* recent theological thought has given us little help towards the restatement of the Christian doctrine of Divine Omnipotence, and popular preaching still largely proceeds upon a conception of God's power which defines it in terms of material force *plus* will, making His love a separable addendum to it instead of its very essence.

But to re-think our thought of God in terms of Jesus Christ means to re-think it in terms of the Cross. It is one of the most hopeful signs of the times that we are at last realising that the reality of the Cross does not stand or fall with any given theology; that neither evangelical sentimentalities, nor modernist evaporations, nor forensic ossifications can avail to blunt its challenge or weaken its attraction. When they have spoken their last word, the Cross still waits at the turning-point of man's pilgrimage. All ways of approach lead to it; all lines of argument converge upon it; every deep instinct of the soul is drawn to it. Theologies may change and institutions perish, but still mankind will survey the wondrous Cross on which the Prince of Glory died. Coarse and mechanical theories of the Atonement may for a time alienate sincere and sensitive souls; but in breaking loose from

* "The World's Redemption," by C. E. Rolt.

crude theories they do not leave the Cross behind them, for the Cross is stamped upon all art and literature, all thought and life. When Roman soldiers cast lots for the garments of the Crucified, they little dreamt that a whole world would clothe its nakedness with these blood-stained folds. If we turn our backs on Calvary, it is only to find the Cross again in "Mr. Britling's" Essex villa, among Dostoïevsky's Russian prisoners, in the pages of the *Referee*. If we refuse to see it in the Mission-field, it meets us in the first selfless life we touch. As well try to run away from the law of gravitation! "The Cross is such a thing," the late Dr. Denney once remarked, "that even if you bury it, you bury it *alive*." *

To stand at the foot of the Cross, forgetting the controversies that have gathered about it in the past and thinking only of its vital meaning for us to-day, is to realise the falseness and shallowness of our conception of God, and to come nearer the core of reality than our recalcitrant souls can bear with comfort. In our fretting perplexity regarding the ways of God with men during the Great War, we were apt to console ourselves with the reflection that "the world's history is the world's judgment," and that in the long run goodness must have its reward and wickedness be cursed with defeat.

* T. H. Walker, "Principal James Denney: A Memoir and a Tribute," p. 72.

But a look at the Cross suffices to dispel that easy confidence. The Cross also says that goodness must triumph in the long run; but it speaks with an accent that shows its seeming corroboration of our facile optimism to be in reality a shattering contradiction. Its "long run" is a very long run indeed—so long that the hearts of many will wax cold. It speaks of a Love that must conquer, a Justice that must prevail; but it is a Love that can see its best-beloved delivered to torture and not raise a hand to save him, a Justice that can see injustice flaunt its shameless victory in the market-place and keep silent. It gives us, in short, a new conception of the omnipotence of God. We asked Him in bitter perplexity why He allowed the earth to be filled with cruelty, why a brutalised nation should be suffered to wreak its lusts upon the innocent and the chivalrous; and so long as we think of God as an omnipotent Being who is also supposed to be Love, we shall continue to ask these questions with despairing vehemence and find no answer to the cry of our souls. But in face of the God of Jesus crucified, they die upon our lips. We know the answer before we ask them. It is: "When did I promise to give My servants such a victory as you are thinking of, or to stay brute force lest these I love best are hurt? Not when I gave My beloved Son to defeat and death and kept My sword in its sheath."

The Cross does not belittle our perplexities;

it shifts their centre of gravity to a profounder depth. In the light of its stern logic they appear shallow and trivial. It meets them, not with an answer, but with a counter-challenge, matching the paradox of human suffering with the greater paradox of a Love that is an inexorable exaction, and a Justice whose sword-edge is a terrible power of mute endurance. "Can you venture upon the depths of such Love?" asks the God of Jesus. "Can you take the Cross seriously, and still keep an unshaken hope in your heart—the hope that lives not only through but by disappointment?" And to accept that challenge is to be born into a new world and to possess a new scale of values. To have truly seen the Cross and still to think of serving God for any reward but the Love that cannot spare us, is an incurable moral stupidity. Rather than continue to worship a Deity who pays His servants in material coin, would we cry out, in face of the bitter agony of Him who always did the Father's will, that it is a terrible and cruel thing to be loved of God. There is a deeper sanity in that cry of revolt than in a conception of the Divine Omnipotence which would make us pronounce the Cross an outrage upon the universe, had we but the courage to follow our conventional beliefs to their logical conclusion.

For if the Cross means anything at all, it means that the one Man who dared to be utterly good and to take the full consequences of good-

ness found no room in the world. The malignity of religious and national leaders, the obtuseness of a mob that howled with the conquering party, and the tragic zeal of good men who failed to recognise goodness when they saw it, conspired to nail Him to the Cross. It means that the world that had produced Plato, the nation whose ear was attuned to the sublime cadence of the prophetic word, was so exasperated at the sight of perfect goodness, so enraged in the presence of utter truth, that it could not tolerate the Man in whom they were incarnate; it had no rest till it had done away with Him. And if goodness and truth meet with a gentler reception in the world to-day, it is because Jesus has lived and died, because He has called to Himself out of the world those who were willing to be crucified with Him. Empty the Cross of all its theological meaning, and still it stands as an irreducible offence to our natural faith in mankind, our fond belief that the majority is always right. The man who looks at the Cross fairly and squarely, though he have given up all dogmatic presuppositions, will find it impossible thereafter to say, *Vox populi, vox Dei,* or to trust that "mixed multitude" which makes up his own strangely composite and treacherous heart. To the mind that faces it honestly, Christianity is sown with paradox and collision. It is at once peace and a sword, healing and wounds, salvation and condemnation. It cannot be neglected without

irreparable loss; it cannot be accepted without leaving indelible scars. It is God meeting man; and what can rob that meeting of its holy terror and its healing sting?

And the Cross does not stand alone. In its wake follows the Church. According to our old thought of God, the history of the Church should have been one long triumphal march, with the seal of sanctity so clearly stamped on the victors' brow that even Christ's enemies could not but fall back silenced and overawed. But instead we have an advance so slow and broken that it seems a retrogression, a record stained by unworthy omissions, disintegrating fanaticisms, long, dull periods of indifference, tragic relapses into worldliness and vice. Says Dora Greenwell, in words that seem to drop like molten lead upon the current sentiment which takes it for granted that the earthly defeat of truth and honour is a stain on the Divine escutcheon:—

> What olden Saga is so dark, so sorrowful, so tracked by error, so stained with crime, as is the history of the Christian Church? Her attitude is one of unceasing antagonism with the great forces of nature which surround her; at once oppressed and an oppressor, a sufferer and one who causes woe, she can only triumph at a mighty cost; so that she seems, in Lacordaire's energetic words, to be "born crucified"—appointed to a foreseen death! Christ is a conqueror whose victories have been always won through loss and humiliation. His battle-flag, like that of Sigurd, while it has ensured

triumph to those who followed it, has brought destruction to him who carried it.*

The history of the Church can only be explained by the Cross—a key which, like that of Bunyan's pilgrim, "grates hard in the lock." On the facile theory of a God who gives swift and palpable victory to His cause, it offers as grim a problem to faith as any created by the war. On such a theory, the only logical conclusion regarding the Church as well as the Empire would be that flung out by Mr. William Watson in his years of revolt :—

> Best by remembering God, say some,
> We keep our high imperial lot.
> Fortune, I fear, hath oftenest come
> When we forgot—when we forgot!
> A lovelier faith their happier crown,
> But history laughs and weeps it down.

Yet the final word of the Cross is not defeat but victory. It speaks of that victory which God has promised to His own. It tells us that when God wished, not to humiliate, but to glorify His Son in the sight of all men, He sent Him to defeat and death; but that defeat *was* the victory, and in that death, death was abolished. For on the Cross an evil world was judged and doomed at the very moment of its triumph. The world offered tempting alternatives to Jesus, and He showed what He thought of them by

* "Colloquia Crucis," p. 98.

deliberately choosing the Cross. The flesh, and especially the carnal mind that ever clothes itself in the trappings of a superior spirituality, did its best to confuse and corrupt His judgments. He condemned it once and for all by nailing it to the Cross. The powers of darkness flattered and threatened Him by turns. He preferred the weakness and dereliction of the Cross to the empire they promised Him, and so judged the Prince of this world. It is easy to see in the Cross a defeat borne willingly by our Lord for us; to see in it a victory is to have a new thought of God.

Nor is the victory of the Cross a victory of non-resistance. Christ died a militant; He died fighting. He was never faced with an alternative such as confronts the pacifist. For Him physical resistance to a hostile national party that had arrayed the whole machinery of the law against Him was out of the question,* unless He condescended to the demagogic methods of false messiahs and incited an impressionable rabble to defy the powers that be—a course which not the most rabid militant deems worthy of any noble man, let alone of the Perfect Man. Only one kind of resistance was open to Christ; and that He chose whole-heartedly. His course was to endure, and to judge His enemies in enduring.

* Unless the reference to "legions of angels" in Matt. xxvi. 53, be taken to imply the possibility of physical resistance—an interpretation few students would venture upon.

## The Need for a New Thought of God

No one can read the account of the trial of Jesus without realising how implacable was His soul's resistance against the moral stupidity and mean malignity that had brought Him before His judges. And in that so terrible because so meek resistance the very nature of God is mirrored. As Christ's enemies set the laws to which His country was subject in motion against Him, so man in sinning has, as it were, confronted God with His own immutable law, the law of freedom graven deep in the nature of both God and man. He has, as it were, "cornered" his Creator, tied the hands of Omnipotence, said to Him in whose image He was made, "You created me free: you cannot compel me to be good, or keep me from being wicked by force." And God's answer is an endurance which is at once a tender pleading and a formidable antagonism. He is not only our Saviour, but also our Adversary; and never more our Saviour than when He is our Adversary. He resists us unto blood, whetting His sword first on His own bosom and so giving it its sharpest edge. He is that Man who wrestles with us until the breaking of the day. "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts." We never realise the smiting force of His resistance until we see Him in Jesus enduring the contradiction of sinners, dumb as a sheep before its shearers, obedient unto the death of the Cross. In that terrible, meek

silence we hear the thunder of doom as we cannot hear it in the clash and clamour of wrath. As we stand face to face with the Christ suffering in silence, suffering in unalterable love, there comes to us a revelation of Love omnipotent which makes it at once the sweetest and the most relentless thing in the universe; at once a dove and a sword, a healing dew and a blasting tempest. It is as we recognise and experience these dread antinomies that we gain a new conception of God.

## IV

Our attempts to explore that conception must begin with a new study of the Gospels, and indeed of the whole New Testament. It is significant that the flood of light which recent scholarship has poured in upon the New Testament has been so scantily utilised by the man of vision, who can seize the throbbing heart of a book and make it live for this generation. We have to a large extent popularised the processes and results of criticism, and are familiar with a style of preaching which is, in effect, little else than diluted Old or New Testament Introduction. But these processes and results, however valid, remain little more than the professional occupation of a few experts, unless the light they bring is used to reveal the very heart of Scripture making it a new book for both preacher and

hearer. True, scholarly research should have no homiletical axe to grind, and the Biblical expert who has an eye to the "preachable" is not greatly to be trusted either as an expert or as a spiritual guide. But it is equally true that the preacher to whom the scholar's work is a pure piece of technical exposition, in whom the vast contribution of critical research to our understanding of the background of the Gospels, the setting of the Pauline Epistles, and the genius of New Testament Greek does not breed a surer grasp, a larger vision, a more potent skill of interpretation, has failed to realise the greatness of his calling. Nothing could be of more evil omen for the future of the Church than the existence of a large body of critical work that has not passed from the scholar's workshop into the very fibre of the exegete, the expositor, and the preacher. All genuine critical scholarship has a spiritual goal. It only needs the man of insight and vision to transmute it to a force which reclaims and re-creates great tracts of Scripture for our age.

To-day it is the Old rather than the New Testament that attracts preacher and hearer. The war has flung us back into an Old Testament atmosphere. Once more the cry of the hard-pressed, hunted soul that echoes through the Book of Psalms, the passionate appeal to a God who will judge and avenge, the solemn imprecations and triumphant hymns of a theocratic

patriotism waken deep chords in the soul. An intensified national consciousness finds support and religious sanction in the history of Israel, and the sense of a grim struggle for truth and righteousness sees its vindication in the God of battles who fights for those who defend His cause. Popular preaching, and not a little of our religious war literature, reflects and furthers this reversion to Old Testament ideals; and the result is not to our highest spiritual advantage. If ever there was a time when we needed to bring all thought and emotion to the test of the perfect revelation of God in Christ Jesus, and not to allow ourselves to hark back to earlier stages of religious development, however we may be tempted to do so by the exigencies of an unparalleled situation in the world of moral feeling, it is surely to-day.

Already, indeed, many are turning away from a type of teaching which fosters hardness without any real strength, and, while stimulating righteous indignation, also tends to increase that element of suspicion and fear which makes even justifiable hatred so dangerous and weakening. Professor W. A. Curtis sees in this reaction the beginning of a genuine return to the New Testament :—

> I have faith that the neglected Book will find interpreters, will reassert its old mastery over the human heart, will cool the passions of a grossly ambitious generation, will steal into distracted minds with the winsome persuasiveness which lent it its former

influence. If the nations are living upon an international level which is Old Testament rather than New Testament in its spirit, it may be that they are being prepared through the bitter experience of war and jealousy and hatred to look with an Old Testament wistfulness towards a New Era of peace and good will established on more secure foundations. Even now, though we sing the Psalms with a new appreciation of their fitness to our case, it is to the New Testament that we turn for admission to a higher hope and a heavenly atmosphere. It is the New Testament that our brave men carry in their reduced kits, the one article in their outfit which lightens their campaigning load. It is the New Testament that will hold up before statesmen and diplomats and potentates a vision of another world than that which they control.*

A return to the New Testament, and especially to the Gospels, in order to elicit for ourselves and for our time its inmost meaning and spirit, is the first step towards recovering that specifically Christian conception of God for want of which our life trails a broken wing. That conception as it unfolds itself in the teaching of Jesus, authenticates itself in His life and gains world-wide redemptive sweep in His death, is the supreme treasure of mankind. From it all personal holiness and all communal righteousness proceed. It is the animating impulse of all fruitful thinking and beautiful living. By it all great art is nourished; out of it are born all

* *The Expositor*, January, 1916.

true philanthropy and social reform. To appropriate it as reflected in our present experience and seen in the light of present vision, and to show it forth to the world in all its constraining beauty and purging severity, is to make a contribution to the age beside which all the national effort that has made these dark days glorious is a small thing in comparison.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HIGHWAY OF THE CROSS

In spite of all that has been done in the interests of a supposedly liberal and enlightened Christianity to eliminate the Cross, or at least to make it of none effect, the deep, ineradicable instinct of the Christian heart insists against all arguments to the contrary upon making it the centre of its faith. It is the Cross that makes the Christian, the Cross that makes the saint. So far from being one of those dogmatic encumbrances that have gathered about Christianity as separable accretions, it is its vital principle. That we do not realise this sufficiently is due to our almost ludicrous deference to outside pronouncements upon Christianity, especially when they happen to come from prominent scientists, philosophers, or *littérateurs*. So long as we continue to be unduly depressed when a President of the British Association takes a materialistic point of view, and almost indecently elated when he argues for a spiritual universe, we have failed to discern what is essential in Christianity. It is characteristic of Christianity, as it is characteristic of every religion which involves a vital experience, that the things that can be "proved,"

or corroborated by the opinion of spectators, whatever be their intellectual prestige, who do not share that experience, are not the things that belong to its vital essence. The essentials of religion cannot be demonstrated in this second-hand way. Their secret lies in the bosom of those who have verified them in terms of life; their witness is inward. Evidence is to be treated with due respect, and one cannot sufficiently deprecate the old-time narrowness and arrogance which ruled out of court the testimony of every-one who did not happen to be a professing Christian. But none the less it remains true that evidence of this external kind is just—evidence, and therefore utterly inadequate to prove the things most worth proving. It is collateral, not central; it strengthens proof, but does not supply it. To come to close quarters with the vital things of Christianity we need the testimony of the Christian soul; and that testimony is something far greater than mere evidence; it is the witness of life. And as we scrutinise that life—not as curious anatomisers, but as open-minded inquirers—we shall find the mark of the Cross inwoven into its very fibre.

## I

Whenever some great calamity or upheaval strips life of its disguises, true-hearted men are drawn to the long-neglected Cross. Chaplains

and others who have come upon soldiers pausing before a French wayside Calvary have been struck by the look of half-bashful yet indubitable recognition in the eyes of some of these men. "I understand at last," these eyes seem to say, "I can't put it into words, but I understand." One wonders if we fully realise the significance of that new understanding; the prevailing tone of recent religious literature does not convey that impression. In that literature we are told again and again that Christianity, so far from being "a subterranean conspiracy against life," is a glorious adventure, a voyage of discovery that sets a man's blood tingling. We are reminded how our brave boys took death in their stride, as it were—calmly, simply, merrily even, without sickly reflection or regret, but rather as that which gives life its bracing salt sting, its imperishable glory. They looked into the bright eyes of danger and read the secret of life there. To despise security and hug risk to one's bosom, not to worry, not to think about oneself at all, but to "do one's bit," with the green fields of England set deep in one's heart and the vision of a new world somewhere at the back of one's mind—that is a man's life, they would say, could they put their souls into words. And what is such a life, we are asked, but a following of the great Adventurer, who also met death early, met it for a world of men, met it without a thought of self? Says a writer of verse, appealing to

the clergy to give a simple, vital Christian message to our men at the Front and in hospital :—

> And tell him that when, calling on his pride,
> He faced the vilest trenches with a jest,
> That when he, crushing natural fear aside,
> Went over, resolute to do his best,
> That when he bore, albeit with anguished face,
> His pain in silence, nor reviled thereat,
> He was as Christ Himself for each brief space,
> Since Christ Himself could scarce have bettered that ! *

"Christ Himself could scarce have bettered that!" The sentiment is natural to hearts bowed down and thrilled by the sacrifice of those who stand between us and the enemy. To what *can* it be compared, except to the supreme Sacrifice on Calvary? What more could Christ have done, had He stood in these men's place? Yes, it is entirely natural that generous hearts, actuated by a genuine religious impulse, should exclaim that Christ Himself could scarce have bettered that. And yet that sentiment has no foundation in reality. It rests upon a pathetic blindness to the deepest meaning of the Cross. If Christ had not infinitely bettered that, the sacrifice of these lads would have been emptied of its noblest significance. If Calvary, while it included their sacrifice, were not a fact so unique that a comparison with any lesser sacrifice is an

* Captain R. S. T. Cochrane, in *Country Life*.

utter impertinence, it could not have refined and transformed the suffering of our men to the high and holy heroism which marked the noblest souls among them. They did so surpassingly well just because Christ had done so incomparably better.

For while Christianity is indeed a great adventure, a life of splendid daring and joyous risk, it is an adventure with a difference. The New Testament thrills with the joy of exploration, and flings a stinging challenge to tameness and mediocrity; yet adventure is not its last word. The adventurer and knight-errant of faith is an investor. He does great business in the high market of chivalry, risking much that he may gain more. But the Christian life at its deepest is not an investment, however noble be the market. It is a sacrifice, and a sacrifice in which not life's meannesses and cowardice, but life's wealth and splendour, are made to pass through the fire. It means the staking of all without any hope of gain; the "laying in dust of life's glory," with only the love that prompted the surrender to uphold the quivering spirit; the mortification of self, not with a view to ultimate self-enlargement, but out of pure, uncalculating devotion to the claims of Divine Love. Its source is not the romantic cross of chivalry, but the wondrous Cross of Redemption.

A writer in one of our religious journals recently expressed his misgiving as to the prob-

able effect upon our soldiers of the many crucifixes that stud the waysides of France. He feared they tended to give them a wrong idea of Christianity as a religion of defeat rather than of victory. This misgiving embodies the central fallacy which is sapping the life out of our religion. If the Gospel is true, then Christ conquered on the Cross and reigns from the Tree. If the world has indeed been judged by the Cross, then its estimates of defeat and victory have been reversed for ever. It is the function of the Cross to show us where defeat lies, and where victory; and to adopt a timid, apologetic attitude which fastens upon the conception of a risen and glorified Conqueror as less likely to antagonise "the man in the street," is to barter our eternal triumph for a cheap effect. It is quite easy to impress "the man in the street" with the figure of a Divine Warrior-King riding forth conquering and to conquer. The world never finds it difficult to take off its hat to success. But our mission is not to impress men; it is to subdue them by the mighty weakness of the Cross. It is not the lifted hat we seek, but the bended knee.

How is it that we who bear the name of Christ are so slow in learning that there is nothing mightier, nothing more irresistibly triumphant, than truth beaten to earth by brute force? In this day of ours, when mere physical power looms so deceptively before even Christian eyes, it is ours to confront the world with a

Crucified Redeemer. It is doing the men who have fought for us a grave injustice to imagine that they are too dull and coarse to appreciate the beauty and wonder of the Cross ; that the figure of the world's Redeemer racked in helpless agony must inspire them with aversion to, if not contempt for, a religion whose symbol is the sign of defeat. Brave souls that have looked pain in the face at its naked worst, and through physical horror have pierced to the deathless glory of sacrifice, are not likely to shrink from the physical element of the Passion with that fatal fastidiousness of taste which looks like refinement but is in reality a lack of the highest spiritual breeding. It is the languid amateurs of religion, whose shallow sentiment covers an impenetrable hardness of heart, that refuse to consider even for one short half-hour the details of an agony which their Lord endured for a whole long day. We need the courage to hold up to men once more the Cross in all its nakedness and let it speak with its own inherent eloquence. We need not fear to repel them. Their deepest instinct demands the Cross, and demands it not least urgently when they call it by another name. We are still too much under the tyranny of theological terms. Men may set aside our interpretation of the Atonement as parsons' talk ; but they know with the unshakable knowledge of the heart that the finest, most sacred thing in life is the self-sacrifice of good men and women

for pure love's sake, and that all such self-sacrifice somehow runs back into the great, mysterious Cross of Calvary. Such a presentation of the Cross does not imply a morbid preoccupation with the physical details of the Passion; it is consonant with no less a reserve than that of the Gospel narrative, but it does demand an equal explicitness and candour. There is a way of preaching the Passion which appeals only to the weak and neurotic; but when rightly emphasised, the physical sufferings of Christ may become so many windows into the mystery of pain, the meaning of redemption. We have so largely identified the Cross with certain devotions and services attended chiefly by elderly ladies, that we have forgotten that it is food for the strong; that while it is the refuge of the penitent and the hope of sinners, its challenge is to the brave. Men who have fought for something dearer than life and have suffered in an unselfish cause are quick to discern that challenge. They know without being told that to stand by the Cross and look on is the final condemnation; that he who has really seen the Cross is pledged to act, to suffer, to be ready to go through the world poor, unpopular, misunderstood, suspected, despised.

We need not, therefore, be too greatly surprised to learn that "The Imitation of Christ" was by far the most popular book with our fighting men, that some have been known to

apply for Church membership after reading it, and that copies have gone the round of whole companies, being passed from man to man till they fell to pieces. For while the book is vulnerable to criticism as an imitation of Christ, and obviously presupposes a monastic temper and outlook, it stands unrivalled as a piece of evangelical wisdom-literature, abounding in sayings as pregnant and penetrative as any found in the Book of Proverbs. Moreover, it exalts the Highway of the Cross as the way for strong men willing to take big risks. It calls upon the brave and true to share the Cross of Jesus. The arm-chair critic may object that its call is limited to the sphere of what used to be called personal sanctification; but the man who has looked death in the face has learnt the simple truism that wherever religion ends, it must begin at home. Jim Bludso, the drunkard and wife-beater, who lost his life in saving a train, is a fact; and one need not quarrel with the poet's comment that "God ain't going to be too hard on a man that died for men." But the average sensible soldier knows that dying for men is not a habit with drunkards and wife-beaters. He has learnt in a grim school that "doing one's bit" amid shot and shell is, after all, merely a curious, crazy new patch on an old garment if it is not backed up and corroborated by the daily witness of a clean, kindly, upright life. And when he reads in "The Imitation of Christ" that

it takes the death of Christ, and a man's daily dying with Christ, to redeem his ordinary stay-at-home life, he knows it is true. Nor is this merely a mood of the trenches. Men to whom a new vision and a new aim have come through their experience at the Front dread going back and working out their salvation by the side of kinsfolk, wives, and comrades who cannot even understand such ideals and aims. These men—and they are many—feel the power of the Cross. They have no theory of the Atonement, but they know that the things they are determined to be loyal to—honour, purity, gentleness, unselfishness—are the things for which Christ died, and that they would never have sought these things if they had not been so unspeakably precious to Him. Between such men and the Crucified there is a deep, inarticulate understanding which years of theological insight cannot produce. Hymns about "the cleansing Blood" puzzle or repel them, or else they slide past their ears as pretty tunes; sermons on the Atonement bore them, for they seem irrelevant to the real issue. Yet they know that in this sign they shall conquer, and when, as in Thomas à Kempis or in Brother Lawrence, they catch the authentic note of those who are experts in the experimental science of the Cross, they pierce through the veil of mediæval phraseology, which the "advanced" theologian often finds an insurmountable barrier, with the swift insight of spiritual affinity.

II

But while the men who have thus grasped the Cross in one experimental aspect have little taste or aptitude for theology, it does not follow, of course, that the Church can dispense with an objective doctrine of the Cross. It is by such a doctrine that the fire of sacrifice has been kept burning in the temple of humanity; and while history has proved how disastrous it is to preach theology to men who are temperamentally unable to appreciate theological arguments but who are intensely interested in religion, it has also proved that whenever the pulpit has disparaged objective doctrine in the interests of subjective intuition, religion itself has decayed. Yet it remains true that whatever be the importance of doctrine, the preacher, as distinct from the theologian, must approach it not technically but experimentally. He must lead his hearers into a deeper thought of the Cross as a truth *by presenting it first of all as a way and a life.*

Nor must it be left to the pulpit to exalt the Cross. The whole of public worship should be the *sacramentum* of the soldiers of the Cross. That it is anything like that, few would care to maintain. The average Church of England service offers a beautiful but antiquated liturgy not understanded of the common people, and breathing a subdued, restrained atmosphere which, how-

ever great its charm, has little in common with the intense devotion, the passionate resolve, the unreserved determination to risk and dare, to endure and sacrifice, which well up from hearts newly opened to the love of God. Nor does the average Nonconformist service, with its stereotyped complement of hymns, many of which have little relation to the religious experience of to-day, and its prayers, which offer no opportunity for personal and corporate response, leave much room for those acts of dedication and fealty, and for that solemn self-identification with God's will which are the natural movement of souls that have seen Jesus. It must, of course, be borne in mind that no service which is really a service of *common* prayer can express that movement exclusively. It must provide equally for the slower pulse, the more tentative approach of those who have not so learnt Christ. Moreover, liturgical reform is at all times a difficult and complicated matter, and must, to a large extent, be left to the expert who at the same time knows the psychology of the Christian soul from the inside. But it cannot be too strongly emphasised that any form or type of worship which does not give expression to the aspirations and loyalties of those to whom there has come a new vision of purpose is gravely at fault. To be convinced that this is so, and to be so deeply convinced of it that it becomes a trouble and a burden, is the first step towards true reform.

And if our worship is to reflect these aspirations and loyalties, the life of the Church must recover the same note. That our Church life bears the image and superscription of the Cross, even its stoutest defenders would hardly be bold enough to assert. As far as the broad, shallow, untroubled stream of conventional Churchmanship is concerned, the Cross still waits, and before we can take it up there is much we must lay down. "Thou hast yet much to part with"—here lies the secret of our failure.

There is our ecclesiastical past to be surrendered—not to be forgotten, indeed, but to be taken from our own vainglorious hands and placed in the hands of our Lord. Dead theories, dead traditions, dead methods, how we hug them to our bosom, sacrificing His sore travail for souls to our obstinate and self-willed adherence to the old rather than the true! Nor are we necessarily a step nearer the truth when we exchange new methods for old. We still often speak of the need for a new theology or new institutions, as if it were a matter of discarding old shoes for new. There is no salvation in such a shallow or light-hearted procedure. What is fundamentally in question is not a new theology or new methods—that is why so many of the books on religious reconstruction seem inadequate to the situation in exact proportion as they are "up to date"—but a new soul, the kind of soul that can address itself to the

task of theological and practical reconstruction with spiritual effect. Reconstruction is not the Church's *first* task. To surrender the past, to be willing to begin again, to accept whatever comes with the seal of God's will upon it, be it startlingly new or disconcertingly old, to care very little about popular catchwords but everything about obeying the great Captain's orders —that is the Church's first business in this difficult and exacting day. It is a task that gives no scope for spectacular heroism. There is nothing to show at the end, except an emptied and docile mind, ready to follow wherever Christ leads.

And with our past there must go—and go for ever—a whole host of cherished conceptions and ideals which have passed too long as Christian. The Church's conception of sin, for instance, is still more conventional than evangelical. We still label certain gross transgressions, especially those we are pleased to call national sins, as sins *par excellence*, forgetting that if the Gospel is true, the gross sinner often retains the capacity of recognising the pure and holy Redeemer when he sees Him, where smug, complacent Pharisaism can look Incarnate Goodness in the face and exclaim, " He hath a devil ! " But if that is so, what becomes of our conventional valuation, what of our persistent belauding of the merely respectable, the morally mediocre, the negatively good ? The truth is we have never yet had the courage to stand for " the blazing scandal and

indiscretion" of Christ's estimate of sin, but in face of it have persistently cherished the mechanical and sterile ideal of a goodness which is three-fourths propriety. And this is only one of many conceptions and ideals current in the Church which, while claiming Christ's sanction, constitute a fundamental, though often unconscious, disloyalty to Him. Everything that puts respectability before love, everything that esteems success above faithfulness, everything that hinders the Church from becoming a refuge for the world's outcasts and a terror to the world's idols—every such thought or practice, however alluring and highly reputed, must go if the Church is to authenticate herself to those who have genuine insight into the genius of Christianity.

But to surrender these things means to take up the Cross. The Church that stands for something other than the vaguely religious ideals which appeal to the majority of well-meaning people who have not yet come within sight of Calvary will find herself driven into the wilderness for a season. True, the earnest, simple, brave-hearted souls to whom a world-crisis has brought a new experience, inarticulate yet profoundly real, will rally to her standard. But it will take years before she will understand how to guide and utilise these new disciples who lack the most elementary prolegomena of Churchmanship, to whom Scriptural, let alone theological, language is an unfamiliar tongue, who cannot see

the reasonableness of things which are axiomatic to those nurtured in the Church, and who take not the slightest interest in questions that are of grave concern to Church folk. It will mean misunderstanding, friction, disappointments, and set-backs. The Church will be tempted again and again to pander to her new constituency as she pandered to her old one ; but if she wishes to persevere in the Royal Highway of the Cross, she must follow where it leads, even though from that time many of her disciples go back and walk no more with her.

In reading books dealing with the Church's past failure and outlining a programme for the future, one sometimes wonders if their authors are aware of the existence of the Cross as the central fact of the spiritual universe. They rightly take the Church to task for her traditionalism, her deference to wealth and social position, her conventionality and tameness ; in short, for her lack of real Christianity. They then proceed to define a Christian Church as one that has democratic sympathies, does self-denying social service, makes for helpfulness and comradeship, gives a reasonable answer to men's doubts, makes religion attractive to the average good fellow who wants to " do his bit," and affords him the moral support and social fellowship which he needs to help him to " keep straight." Such a Church, they not unreasonably assert, would never need to complain of empty pews or a

decline in membership. And this ideal would be entirely commendable—if Jesus had not died upon the Cross, and if the Church of the New Testament had not been a Church of men who had been redeemed and made one by an experience which can only be explained in terms of the Cross. As we read the Gospel story of the passion and death of Jesus, so terrible in its restrained simplicity, so compelling in its unexpressed appeal, the ideal of a Church based upon the conception of Christ as merely " the Lord of all good life " and designed to appeal to the average good fellow looks pitifully small and cheap.

## III

If Christianity is indeed a universal religion —and only a world-religion can meet the need of any nation or class—it must be of wider import than is indicated by the idiosyncrasies of the average man, be he Englishman or Hindu. We are anxious to remove from Christianity every element that antagonises that average man, and we imagine that in doing so we are getting rid of narrowing dogmas and obscuring accretions. But what if these things, so far from being man-made limitations of Christianity, are the very marks of its universality ? What if the objections of the average man, instead of being the righteous rebellion of the free soul,

are the blind protestations of the limited, the insular soul? It is because Christianity embraces the whole world in its sweep, because it includes in perfect proportion every valid spiritual ideal and aspiration, that it repels as well as attracts the natural man, and repels that it may the more potently attract. It was not its narrowness that made it a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. It irritated both because it attempted to lead both into a wider world, opening the eye of the Hebrew to the glory of suffering, and initiating the Greek into a deeper knowledge than that of the intellect merely. It offended men, and offends men to-day, as perfect symmetry offends the eye that is used to one-sidedness and disproportion. It is precisely its full-orbed perfection that makes it, wherever faithfully preached, something of a stinging provocation alike to the honest good fellow in England, who suspects it of being other-worldly, and to the ascetic Hindu, who regards it as decidedly worldly. Shall we really seek to escape this difficulty by preaching a jolly, common-sense version of Christianity to the British working-man, and an esoteric, etherealised version to the religious Hindu? No sane person would consider such an expedient with any seriousness. There must be, of course, many different avenues of approach to Christianity, and the wise teacher will not dream of trying to force the Eastern mind to enter the Temple by the same gate as

the Western. Yet he will never allow himself to forget that the object of Christianity is to make East and West one by initiating both into a new type of life in which their differences are not fostered, but transcended, and their one-sidednesses corrected, as only life can transcend and correct the limitations of race and temperament. To enter into this new life, however many be its gates, cannot be easy either for the East or for the West; and as long as we conceive it our mission to offer to each only those elements in Christianity which correspond to its idiosyncrasies, so long will the coming of that creative, unifying life be delayed.

It is at this point that the old word concerning the blessedness of them that are not offended in Jesus finds its relevancy. There is something in Jesus—something in His way of looking at things, and His way of appraising things—that shocks the judgment of the natural man, limited as it is by racial and temperamental prepossessions. Whether we be cast in a Hebraic or in a pagan mould, whether our affinities are with the meditative East or with the pragmatic West, we cannot look at Jesus with unveiled eyes without being conscious of that collision which the Gospels call "offence." It is not doubt, though it may be described as the ethical and spiritual correlative of doubt. It is to faith what paradox is to reason. It stands at the cross-roads from where the shining path of faith and the dark

trail of despair branch off to their respective ends. The pilgrim may evade it; and the result of such evasion is writ large in the utter impotence of all versions of Christianity from which the element of offence has been excised. The reason why the religious liberalism which distilled an undogmatic Christianity from the New Testament was powerless to produce anything more important than a small circle of mildly thoughtful apostles of sweetness and light is that Christian personality can only be created by man's contact with those stern collisions of the Gospel which challenge our obtuseness and make us aware of the tremendousness of our salvation. While a liberal interpretation of the Christian facts doubtless makes it more easy for a man to *accept* Christianity, it makes it far more difficult for him to *retain* it amid the grim problems which life sets to a facile and gently reasonable faith. Nowhere does Ibsen's "Easy to lift, difficult to carry" find such poignant application.

And the offence of Christianity centres in the Cross. To preach that Cross, not merely as a model of selfless love and sacrifice which we can follow, though at a distance, but as a great, unique, objective fact, a settled axiom of the spiritual world which must re-make us before we can speak of "recapitulating" it, is to preach the great "offence." To lift up the Cross once more as the supreme revelation of

sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; as the redeeming Act of God giving Himself in love that risks all; as the power that has broken down and is breaking down all barriers of race, class and sex, that has destroyed and is destroying the present world-order, is to confront men with something that cuts deep into their most cherished interests and aims. The man who sets out to tread the way of the Cross honestly but not knowing whither he goes, and who does not sooner or later come face to face with the offence—that great challenging element in the Cross which makes demands flesh and blood cannot entertain with equanimity—will not remain on that road very long. He will trail off down some flowery by-path, and in the end will have nothing left of his initial aspiration except, perchance, a faded, sentimental piety that likes to have a nicely-carved cross on its *prie-dieu*. Some day the pilgrim of the Cross must be brought to the point where he really sees that to which his generous ignorance has committed him. It rests with the Church to see to it that he does not miss that crucial bend of the road; that the flowers of pulpit rhetoric, popular religious poetry, and facile sentiment do not hide the true Cross from him. It is because she has done so little to make men truly and wholly Christian and so much to keep them Church members that her message lacks power, and her life fails to convince.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CROSS AND THE ALTAR

In the middle of St. Paul's great polemic against the Judaisers, when the Apostle seems to have disappeared behind the controversialist, we come upon the classic outburst, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The words are used with a polemic intention, yet such is their inherent magic, their indissoluble connection with a larger context, that the argumentative leader and his irritating opponents disappear. We are out on the deeps of God. The ephemeral has receded, and we are left face to face with the tremendous fact that for Paul the whilom Pharisee, who had never seen Jesus in the flesh, there was but one thing wherein to glory—His Cross; and that this glorying of his set the world on fire from end to end. Church history makes melancholy reading, but the true life of the Church is no more contained in the events of Church history than the true life of England can be gathered from the newspapers. It is found in the great succession of men and women of all races, types of culture and training who,

glorying in the same Cross, have been living witnesses to its grace and power. It is for want of a Church glorying in the Cross that our preaching of it is feeble and unattractive. We apologise for it, we explain it very carefully, we seek to formulate a sane theology of it, and to interpret it in consonance with present-day feeling. But we cannot as a Church be said to *glory* in it; if we glory at all, it is in our courage to preach it in these difficult days. And as we contrast St. Paul's exultant joy in the Cross with our demure acceptance of it, and once more look into the meaning of the apostle's exclamation and into the experience which lies behind it, we may discover how to preach the Cross, as well as the reason why we fail to glory in it.

## I

It was not in his own cross that St. Paul gloried. We can understand him better when he speaks of glorying in tribulation, but the thought of exultation in a cross not our own is becoming increasingly foreign to us. In glorying in the Cross of Jesus Christ, the great Apostle exulted, not primarily in the Cross as a symbol of service, but in the Cross that creates penitence by revealing man's sin as seen in the light of a Love so great that humiliation is sweetened with gratitude and self-contempt glorified with adoring wonder, as we gaze into its depth. It

is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of service, but it is quite easy to lay a false emphasis upon it. Much of our present-day teaching is almost hysterical in its exaggerated stress upon the need for utilising the passion for service, and in its reiterated warnings against repelling men by calling them to repentance. In support of such a view, the story of Christ's call to His first disciples is twisted out of its elucidating context. We are told that Jesus, in calling the Galilean fishermen from their nets, summoned them to a stirring enterprise, a glorious adventure, making no conditions except willingness to serve, imposing no test save that of loyalty. But the facts will not bear construing in the light of this modern convention. Behind them lies the ministry of John the Baptist—a ministry which Jesus acknowledged, making its message of repentance the text of His early preaching. The disciples were familiar with the concept of repentance and penitence ; what they needed was to be emancipated from it, that they might return to it later and invest it with the new content created by their experience of Christ. To argue as if they were twentieth-century Englishmen, as is so often done in the interests of a vicious apologetic, is surely to juggle with an historical situation.

We are to-day in the trough of a reaction against a theology—ostensibly Protestant, but essentially a Roman legacy—which hypostatises

sin as if it were a tangible substance that can be viewed apart from its concrete manifestations, and judged apart from the circumstances under which it is committed and from the person who commits it. This type of theology has always tended to foster a negative attitude, making not positive goodness but mere sinlessness the Christian's goal, and defining sin as what Dora Greenwell calls " the violation of a sort of divinely constituted etiquette." The inevitable consequence of such a conception is to use the term "repentance" with a technical connotation, intelligible to minds trained in theological distinctions and ecclesiastical subtleties, but quite remote from the thought and feeling of the average layman, and corresponding to nothing in his religious experience. It is out of the reaction against a presentation of the Gospel which reduced both sin and repentance to theological abstractions that the present-day cult of adventure and service takes its rise. But while it is obviously true that every generous instinct of the human heart protests against a religion which is little more than a fire-escape, no useful end is served when responsible teachers and leaders speak as if it was a case of having to choose between a caricature of Christianity and a presentation of it which puts service before penitence, and accepts a vague allegiance to Christ as a substitute for complete discipleship. We are involved in no such dilemma. Whatever a by-

gone theology has made of sin and repentance, we know them to be profound realities, and therefore capable of being presented convincingly to men of good will in every age. A passion for service is to be welcomed as of the most hopeful augury; but it is destined to barrenness, unless it be used as a stepping-stone to a genuine realisation of sin and a lifelong repentance. This is only what our experience of everyday life indicates. We would think very little of a man whose first thought, after having wronged the soul of the woman whose honour is in his keeping, is to redouble his external attentions and expend more money upon presents. What we instinctively demand from such a one is, first of all, a sense of shame and guilt so deep that he hesitates to approach his victim, feeling his very touch would be an added insult. If we did approve of the external service, it would be in the case of coarse-grained natures, in whom it is the outward sign of a growing inward penitence. Why should we leave our healthy instincts behind us when we approach the deepest aspects of life? Why should we, misled by an entirely natural desire to make religion attractive to men, act as if to conceive of it as "doing one's bit," and to regard worship, adoration, confession and penitence as so much "trimming" were not merely understandable, but a positive advance upon what we are pleased to call a superseded type of religion? If the ancient Greeks recog-

nised that life needed to be purged by pity and terror, can we do less? And in seeking to regain a true conception of repentance, we shall secure that pity and terror, instead of being instruments of world-weariness and despair, as they were in the ancient world, shall be the instruments of life abounding and full of joy.

Is it really true that the Christian mind, in insisting upon repentance as the foundation of all genuine religion, has smitten the life of past ages with gloom and morbidness? One would almost think so, to judge from the utterances of certain teachers and preachers, who seem to view Christian teaching exclusively through the somewhat unreliable medium of the man at the front. One freely admits that it is high time that we saw ourselves "as Tommy sees us"; but the salutary force of such a view is not increased in the very least by imagining that we are gazing at an entirely faithful likeness. That "Tommy" sees us as he does—as a doleful company of prigs and weaklings, wasting our time in repenting of imaginary sins and in performing useless ceremonies, and too much concerned about the things we ought not to do to have any time left for doing anything that is positively good—is largely our own fault, but by no means entirely so. To imply that "Tommy" enjoys a clarity of vision and correctness of judgment denied to most mortals, and claimed least of all by those who know the object of his criticism

from the inside, is one of those aberrations of enthusiasm which will cost us dear if allowed to persist unchecked. "Tommy's" view, however deeply to be pondered, is not the light that can guide us through the maze of failure and perplexity; and to reject the old theological definitions of sin, repentance, holiness, and worship merely to substitute for them the crude and often distorted conceptions of "the man in the street" would be a ludicrous proceeding, were it not profoundly pathetic.

Unless we recover the note of repentance and penitence, our religion will become but another form of moral sentiment and social service, and thus cease to be a religion—a force that creates moral sentiment and inspires social service. And we can only recover it by rediscovering the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a positive message that is in question, not a barren protest. To inform a man who is attracted to Christianity by his desire to serve that he will not be allowed to serve until he has somehow attained to a sufficient realisation of his unworthiness and to an adequate feeling of penitence is to repel him without bringing him one iota nearer to reality. But as we confront such a one with the Cross, showing its bearing, not upon the vague, theoretical quantity called sin, but upon the meanness of our best service, the littleness and shoddiness of our highest motives and intentions, the poorness of our

most energetic efforts, the feeble, anæmic hue of our virtues, and the pitiful folly of our faults and defections, shame and aspiration will be born in the heart that is willing to face so searching a revelation. A profounder recognition of inbred sin and a more subduing sense of wonder and adoring love may come later—how far a man will pierce into the depths of the spirit depends largely upon his temperament—but meanwhile there will be honest shame and a dim yet real conviction that the only chance for such a poor, stained, twisted life as his is to keep very close to the Crucified. In the measure in which a genuine repentance is present, penitence will become the man's habitual attitude. From seeing himself foolish, mean and warped, he will come to trace within his soul a fatal desire to evade the claims and consequences of the Cross. He will discover the radical twist in his will, the lurking antipathy of his heart to a goodness which is something other than mere good nature. At this point it will dawn upon him that something more is needed than the mere recognition of the objective fact of the Cross; something more even than an attitude of thankful wonder and humble love towards the Crucified. He will, in fact, be prepared to enter into the Pauline conception of being crucified with Christ. Glorying in a Cross not his own, St. Paul nailed his life to it until he was dead, not merely to the old world-order, but to the old self.

One is accustomed to hear this experience dismissed as a piece of exaggerated symbolism, a mystical feeling having no foothold in reality. And it certainly is no more than that, so long as it is divorced from an objective doctrine of the Cross and from the penitence which it creates. It is astonishing how glibly such sentiments as " suffering with Christ on behalf of men," " sharing His agony over nations at war," and actually " bearing the burden of a broken, bleeding world as He bore it " fall from the lips of fashionable devotees of pseudo-mysticism. That such sentiments often coexist with an all but impregnable self-righteousness, and with an amazingly supercilious attitude towards poor, benighted people who " still " believe in the " official " doctrine of the Atonement, is not to be wondered at. Whenever fellowship in Christ's sufferings does not begin with a deep inward hatred of the sins that caused them, chiefly the sins of one's own heart, it is a piece of that unreality and self-deception which dog the religious temperament.

## II

For generations past we have theologised about the Cross to the point of losing our good temper and Christian charity, and almost to the point of losing our own souls, but we have been far too little concerned to ask if we know what it means to be crucified with Christ. Yet if the

testimony of St. Paul is valid, we have no right to theologise at all, except upon the basis of the crucified life. Whether our theology be orthodox or heterodox matters very little; in either case it is a sheer impertinence, unless we bear the Cross stamped upon the fibre of our lives. Like the Fathers of Nicæa, we must come into the arena of theological discussion with the marks of the Lord Jesus upon us. Our theology must be graven upon the palms of our hands.

But how are we to commend the crucified life to a generation that looks upon the ascetic element in religion as so much mediæval lumber? What can demonstrate its power and glory to "the man in the street"—or the man in the pew, for that matter?

The task should not be so difficult, after all. For the crucified life is the surrendered life, and if we have learnt anything during these years of stress and strain, it is that the only life worth living is the life that is freely given to a good cause; not lent with calculating intent, but flung down with the superb generosity of youth. Men who have learnt this lesson will surely not be surprised when we tell them that the only thing that really matters in religion is whether our souls, our wills, our deepest selves are really surrendered to God. Such men will have no difficulty in understanding St. Ignatius Loyola's saying, "Give me twelve men wholly surrendered

to God, and I will convert the world with them." Their experience will supply them with an analogy to the saint's lament that "very few men understand what God would do with them if they would yield themselves entirely to Him." Unreserved surrender to a great power, a mighty impulse—their hearts vibrate to that iron string.

The Christian therefore who has begun in penitence and ended at the Cross can to-day appeal to his neighbours for whom religion merely means "doing one's bit" with a confidence which was impossible before. "I, too," he might say, "want to serve. But then I want to be quite sure that I am bringing my best to my service. I feel I dare not bring to it a soul choked with its own prejudices and predilections, a will poisoned and warped by subtle self-seeking, a spirit obsessed by its faulty aspirations and ideals—by that good, in fact, which is the enemy of the best. I want to bring a crucified life—a spirit that is dead to self and alive to God—to the saving of society. I want to lose my life with Christ before I have the hardihood to try and save the life of my generation. I dare not criticise the existing order of things so long as my disabling prejudices, my undisciplined inclinations, have not been killed at the root. I believe it takes the best of us a lifetime to distinguish between our convictions and our prejudices, and for myself I have discovered that I cannot distinguish between mine except as

I nail both to the Cross. I have tried to serve without the Cross, but my efforts were so queerly out of keeping with the rest of my life; and this led to the discovery that one cannot use one's will day after day in the service of one's own moods and fancies, and then suddenly turn it on the accomplishment of some humanitarian purpose or public reform. I had used my will selfishly for long years, and found I could not suddenly, on a mere impulse, turn it into 'an instrument of righteousness.' The work was all right, but I had not the sort of will that goes with such work. I lacked the humble, teachable, disciplined mind, and therefore nothing I did had any strength and effectiveness. It didn't convince anyone, and least of all myself. In the end I realised that there was something in me that had to die, and that it could only die on the Cross with Christ. I knew it would be a slow, piecemeal business—a daily dying, in fact; but I also knew that it was worth it all. And so I brought my old life to the Cross and kept it there till every bit of it was condemned to death."

Much futile discussion has centred round the old, deep question of what it means to be crucified with Christ, and whether, indeed, such an idea is not entirely alien to a gospel of life abundant. The reconciliation of self-sacrifice and self-realisation is at all times a difficult matter. Both clearly have their place in Christianity, and the profoundest thinkers have failed to adjust their

rival claims. But while the subject bristles with inherent difficulties, its root difficulty is imported into it by our doctrinaire attitude to what is essentially a vital issue. We first define life according to our own preconceived notions, and then proceed to argue that the ascetic principle is inimical to life. We appraise the opposing demands of self-realisation and self-surrender, forgetting that while we are all more or less qualified to talk about self-realisation, since we all strive to realise ourselves in one way or another, only those who have some experimental knowledge of what it means to be crucified with Christ are competent to appraise both self-sacrifice and self-realisation. In contending that Christianity stands, not for the suppression, but for the intensifying of life, we need first to be quite sure as to the kind of life which Christianity aims at. Briefly, it is a life that presupposes a death —a life that is not merely a purified and perfected edition of man's natural life, but a new birth, or rather a resurrection. This resurrection is not a negation of the natural life. In it every worthy characteristic of that life is preserved and transfigured; yet, in its totality, it is not a renovation, but a new creation, life remade from its centre. As the late Archdeacon Wilberforce phrased it, "Christianity is not an old-Adam renovation society." Jesus is the Resurrection before He is the Life, and there is no resurrection without a dying.

And once that is granted, the whole issue shifts its centre. Having agreed that Christianity implies not merely life, but a resurrection life—a rising up from the grave of a dead self—the only question that remains is whether the process St. Paul calls being crucified with Christ is indeed the sure and fruitful way to the realisation of that life in its fullness. The answer will depend upon whether we define the ascetic element in Christianity as a deliberate system of moral and spiritual self-improvement, or as the spontaneous desire of the redeemed soul to enter into the sufferings of Christ, and of the poor and despised who are so dear to His heart, so that by any means it may gain a more intimate fellowship with Him. (With the perverted and essentially pagan conception that voluntary mortification is a means of earning the Divine favour we are not concerned here.) The majority of writers take the first view. Principal Garvie, for instance, while rightly contending that "Jesus calls to no artificial asceticism, but to a real bearing of the Cross in fellowship with and following of Him," * yet defines Christian asceticism as "a limitation of desire for the sake of the soul's independence." † That asceticism may and should be a mode of the soul's communion with God—a spiritual necessity rather than a moral drill—does not seem to come within his purview. "As the athlete in training does

* "Can We Still Follow Jesus?" p. 119. † *Ibid.* p. 118.

deny himself pleasures he would otherwise enjoy, so the Christian who wants to be strong and brave should practise a measure of self-denial even as regards lawful enjoyments. To endure a great temptation a man must prepare himself by constant self-control; and it is not an illegitimate asceticism for a man to endure some hardness voluntarily, that he may be fit and able to withstand when the evil day comes upon him." *

Such self-discipline has, of course, its legitimate place in life, but it is not the impelling motive of a true Christian asceticism. That motive is indicated by the Pauline words, "with Christ." "I am crucified with Christ." To be crucified alone, however effective it may be as a piece of moral gymnastics, is a dangerous thing. There is nothing more unlovely and, on a thorough view, more ineffectual in the spiritual world than the man who mortifies his desires with a view to self-improvement; nor is there a more prolific source of Pharisaism and harshness than this type of self-denial. It narrows the sympathies, dries up the sources of compassion, impairs true insight, and blights every action with self-consciousness. In essence it is pagan rather than Christian, and resolves itself into little more than the systematisation of self-will. To be crucified with Christ is to enter upon a life continents removed from the bleak

* "Can We Still Follow Jesus?" p. 117.

existence of the self-regarding ascetic. It also is a discipline, it also involves a long and exacting process; but it is a discipline informed by a great spiritual impulse, a spontaneous movement of the soul. There is no thought of self-improvement, only of coming into closer contact with the great Lover of men, and sharing in some small measure His pain and sore travail, His intentions and expectations.

In a certain village there lived a wealthy lady, who suddenly decided to leave her fine old house and live for a whole year in the most ill-conditioned cottage on her estate, taking the place of an old woman who had lived and died there, using her broken old furniture, living on the coarse, scanty fare that had supported the old woman's life, wearing clothes as old and threadbare as hers had been, working all day at mending nets and other ill-paid jobs. Her neighbours were naturally puzzled, some concluding that she wished to expiate a secret crime, others that she had become a Roman Catholic and was working out a cruel penance imposed on her by the priest, others that she was a harmless lunatic. But the truth was quite simple. Her soul had suddenly awakened, and she had realised with horror that she was a selfish, unsympathetic woman, narrow in mind and heart, who could not even think herself into the position of the poor folk who were her tenants and neighbours. It came to her that sympathy and love

were the only things worth having; and when, with all her trying, she could not break down the barrier, she went down to live in the old cottage with the leaking roof and the rotten floor, feeling that no amount of discomfort and privation mattered, if only she could get to the hearts of her neighbours by understanding them from the inside.

In this incident we have a perfect picture of Christian asceticism—a picture that appeals at sight to the human heart. To come face to face with Jesus means to realise that our motives, our sympathies, the very trend of our being are alien to Him; that even while we are being drawn to Him, a hostile principle buried deep in our lives bars His way to us and ours to Him. And as we let Him have His way with us and the links that bind us to Him are riveted closer, one overmastering desire swallows up all else—the desire to be so closely identified with Him that we shall see the world through His eyes, and that His mind shall be ours. Then we realise more fully the nature of the gulf that separates us from Him. His life is symbolised by the Cross; ours by the sceptre. His heart beats for all men; ours for a narrow circle determined by self. His intentions and purposes are those of redeeming Love; ours those of a thinly disguised self-interest. And we recognise there is only one way to union with Him. We must put this old loveless, self-

centred life to death upon a cross not of our own making. We must make His way our way, His pain our pain, His travail ours. We must put ourselves in the line of His intentions and purposes, making His outlook our own. That is a crucifixion—no term less drastic corresponds to the reality—and a rising again. It is not a cold, deliberate system of self-training, but a transforming emotion, a fiery passion. It has nothing to do with stained-glass windows, dull books, and cramping rules and regulations: it is an *adventure of love*. It doubtless involves dreary days and back-breaking toil—what adventure does not? But behind them lies ever the warm movement of the human heart, not the mechanical commands of the spiritual drill-sergeant. Nor is it the experience—passionate enough, but still "departmental"—of a few predestined lovers of the Cross. It is rather the gate of a life so wide, a sympathy so warmly human, that the wisest among poets and artists and the most ardent among philanthropists have kindled their torches at its fire. It is true, of course, that many who profess to have been crucified with Christ are hard and narrow, and that not a few who claim no kind of contact with Him abound in brotherly love. But if the Cross is not merely an accident, or a desperate expedient, but the very ground-plan of the Universe, then man can only attain to true love and tender compassion as he identifies himself with Him

who took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses in His supreme act of self-giving.

The supposition that such identification is merely a matter of sorrow and suffering; that the Cross has no imparting of insight, no glorious surprises, no unfoldings of love and wisdom, no power, no thrill, no joy to irradiate, cannot be tolerated for a moment. Traherne did well when he extolled the Cross as "the throne of delights," declaring it to be "the abyss of wonders, the centre of desires, the house of wisdom, the theatre of joys, the root of happiness, and the gate of Heaven." *

For generations souls of high mettle have revolted from the Cross as from something that contracts human life, takes the light out of the sun, and brings the stuffiness of the cloister into God's free and open world.

> Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean!
> The world has grown grey with Thy breath!

Much water has run under the bridge since Swinburne uttered his feverish protest, and neither the revolting pagan nor the discouraged Christian is quite so sure that the "pale Galilean" has indeed conquered; yet the note of revolt is heard wherever a man is bored by a Church service, or repelled by an uncongenial presentation of the Gospel. But the fault is not with Jesus and His Cross. It may lie in the service

* "Centuries of Meditation," pp. 39, 41.

or teaching, or it may lie with the ignorant or unsympathetic mind of the critic. In either case the blame rests, not with the Cross, but with our poor, narrow conception of it. We first deplete the Cross of that half of its content which gives colour and meaning to the other half, and then talk glibly of "a positive, virile Christianity" that has left the stage of self-mortification behind it. Very slowly does it come home to us that, with all our talk of virility, we are not producing virile character; that our unpruned and undisciplined nature, so far from being the glorious, free, untrammelled thing we imagine it to be, is in reality a poor dupe to its whims and fancies, its preferences and idiosyncrasies. One cannot listen to the conversation of even genuinely religious people, with its ever-recurring "I think," "I don't hold with it," "it doesn't appeal to me," and other selections from the phrase-book of egoism, without realising that we are not merely incomplete but actually ridiculous in our self-importance and lack of proportion without some such radical life-process as being crucified with Christ. The seriousness with which we take our most ill-considered views and ungrounded dislikes, the positive reverence with which we handle our prejudices, the importance we ascribe to our feelings and moods—all these things would provoke us to healthy merriment, had we anything of that delightful sense of humour which always

distinguished the saints and is one of the most powerful of nature's aids to grace.

The only way of escape from weakness so undignified and pretensions so hollow—in short, from our self-complacent religious mediocrity, is to let the Cross break us and make us over again. Always it has been the Cross that has made the priest, the warrior-saint. We cannot wriggle out of the logic of facts by expatiating upon the superstition and puerility that marked the mediæval cult of the Cross. Many of those who in past ages have made the Cross their only prayer-book, manual of ascetics, and compendium of theology were hampered by gross superstition; but mediocre or weak they were not. Theirs was a strong, heroic spirit that laughed at impossibilities, and claimed the whole world for God. "When once the saints of the Society said, 'I *will*,' it was done," wrote Father Paul Ginhac, himself a hero of the Cross, concerning the early Jesuits. "Ah, may God deliver us from these *half-wills*, from those men of the 'happy medium' who will and do not will, who will a certain thing but not everything. That is the greatest scourge in religion."

We deplete the Cross of its rich plenitude of meaning when we connect it only with repentance, or with the passive virtues, and fail to recognise in it that Tree of Life out of which all strong and genuine manhood grows. We deplete it further when we confine it within the

limits of the individual experience. If the soul must be crucified with Christ, so must the Church; and the reason why the Church goes weak and halting to-day is that she will not consent to die. She clings to a life that depends upon the suffrages of men, and in trying to gain votes she has lost influence. For man, in spite of his blindness and error, demands from the Church not support, but leadership. Deep down in his soul he expects to be challenged, and not to be cajoled. He looks for a God that answers by fire; for a Bride of Christ terrible as an army with banners. He wants to see the sword that pierces to the marrow, the fan that thoroughly purges the threshing-floor, the axe that is laid to the root of the tree. But of the Church it might rather be said, as Dora Greenwell said of the Renascence, that, refusing to die, "it remained alone."

The Renascence, with all the glorious elements it contained, was not able to regenerate the Humanity it sought to deify, because it would not in any way consent to die, nor acknowledge that there is in all mortal things a corrupt principle needing restriction, and even excision. Therefore "it remained alone," and soon passed into a heartless self-worship and dilettantism, willingly ignorant of all man's deeper woes, as cruel as the fanaticism it displaced, and under some aspects even more repulsive. So too will all modern systems pass into inanition which deny or ignore, as regards spiritual and moral life, a truth which natural life almost forces us

to accept through the strong analogies it presses on our notice; the "necessary death" through which, as through a gate, all life needs to pass, before it can enter upon a new condition of being, and failing of which it remains alone, locked up in the death of a merely seeming life, like a mummy or petrifaction.*

How little the Church has dared to be crucified with Christ has emerged during the war. When, in the early days of the war, the nation thrilled with a high ideal and was open as never before to the influence of spiritual leadership, the Church was content to be an echo of popular patriotism, instead of lifting that patriotism to the level of Calvary. It had no message for the hour; it merely marked time by giving a faint religious flavour to the better kind of newspaper platitude. To realise this it is not necessary to go far below the surface; one need only ask what the Church has done to Christianise that body of passionate indignation which swept through us as the tale of German atrocities was unfolded. She has certainly told us that we do right to be angry, and warned us to discriminate between righteous wrath and blind hatred; but any decent moralist could have told us that, and every sane journalist has told us that over and over again. What we looked for from the Church was to set beside the justifiable but imperfect indignation of the people the moral indignation of those who see all things from the standpoint of the Cross.

* "Colloquia Crucis," pp. 141–42.

For the moral indignation that springs from the Cross is not merely indignation at moral wrong. It is, first and foremost, a vision of that wrong as directed, not merely against the cause or the person, the country or the Church, to which one has given one's allegiance, but ultimately against the heart of the Universe; against that which makes goodness and truth, love and beauty, possible; against the God who loves men so supremely that He cares more for their character than for their comfort. The man who is capable of the highest type of moral indignation is the man who feels human wrong and sin as a hurt to God, and therefore a hurt to himself; who is so closely identified with God that nothing can pierce the Heart of the Eternal without piercing his heart also. Such indignation involves far more than righteous anger against the criminal and passionate sympathy with his victims. It is based upon the conviction that the most tragic thing in this world-tragedy is the fact that a nation which might have been a pillar of righteousness and a leading partner in every noble crusade has become a vulture-nation, a beast of prey, a horde of vandals. To feel this as the darkest blot upon the Universe, the deepest anguish to God, and the most bitter shame of our common humanity, and to utter one's condemnation out of an intense personal realisation of these things, is to achieve the moral indignation that will strengthen, purify

and uplift a nation, where a lower type tends to breed Pharisaic complacency.

And while not a few voices from within the Church have sounded this note, the Church as a whole has adopted the lamentable policy of supplying a bowdlerised version of popular sentiment, and of carefully watering down any conception of patriotic duty which might clash with conventional opinion. While our newspapers give hospitality to the utterances of far-seeing men—prophets of a new and larger patriotism—the Church is still afraid to express what many thoughtful minds in all political camps have accepted years ago. In this, as in some other respects, the despised Puritans might read us a salutary lesson. At a time of grave crisis these staunch, deep men were able to rebuke and exhort the nation, and to influence public opinion with an effectiveness which makes the Church of to-day appear tragically impotent. The reason for this is not far to seek. While the Puritans were true patriots and strong Churchmen, while they loved England to the giving of their hearts' blood, and the Church as the unconquerable company of the redeemed, their outlook was bounded by neither. They viewed all things—the nation and the Church included—in relation to the Kingdom of God. Their horizon was limited only by His purposes. They saw Holy Love enthroned in the centre of the Universe, and out of that vision they condemned

wrong with an indignation that impressed even the careless. For them every sin, even when its effects were frustrated on earth, made the pillars of the Universe to tremble, and every wrong, though it failed to hurt a single human being, reverberated in the pure courts of Heaven. For all their grimness and literalness, it is they, not we, who could have entered most deeply into the mind of that anti-Puritan mystic, William Blake :—

> A robin redbreast in a cage
> Sets all heaven in a rage ;
> A skylark wounded on the wing
> A cherubim doth cease to sing.

We of to-day think only of the redbreast's misery and the lark's pain. We are humanists, and therefore futile. For life is more than humanism, and only he who has seen wrong as it pierces the Heart of God, and not merely as it makes the hearts of men to bleed, can be a prophet to his generation. We may learn humanism at the crib of Bethlehem—and it is a Divine lesson, indeed—but the power that makes humanism effective, instils healing into the tears of pity, and puts a sword into the hand of indignation, can only be got at the Cross. That the Church has not sought it there, but has been more concerned to live with the crowd than to die with Christ, is the measure of her failure.

# Christianity in the New Age

## III

One of the most momentous religious tendencies of to-day is the movement towards the recovery of the sacramental principle, which is beginning to find its way even into the Free Churches. We are coming to recognise that at the centre of our religion is not a Cross only, but an Altar. The Saviour we worship is not merely One who once accomplished a great redeeming Act on our behalf, but One who gives us day by day His Body and Blood, broken and poured forth, that we may live. It follows that the centre of our worship cannot be mere praise and adoration, or confession and intercession, or teaching and inspiration; cannot be anything less, indeed, than united partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, and the offering of our own bodies and souls as a living sacrifice. It must consist not in words, but in an act in which all the powers of the soul are engaged, and which is at once a taking and a giving. Whatever the gulf between the sacerdotal and the evangelical interpretation of that principle, all who have a vision of the Altar are agreed as to its primitive significance. A formal celebration of Holy Communion as a mere memorial feast is a service without an Altar; a Quaker meeting based upon the intention of partaking of the Divine Life, and of reconsecrating the lives of the worshippers as a pure offering, has the Altar in its midst.

## The Cross and the Altar

To trace the revival of sacramentalism, as distinguished from sacramentarianism, to its roots and follow out its implications, would take us far beyond the range of our subject. One thing, however, must be emphasised. If the principle: No Gospel, no Mass, holds true, it is as fundamentally true to say: No Cross, no Altar. This means that only those who have accepted the Cross both as an objective fact and as a personal experience can partake of the Sacrament "worthily." The Communion is indeed more than the *sacramentum* of pledged soldiers of the Cross; but unless it is that first of all, it can be little more than a pious symbol, where it is not a magical superstition. Any theory of the Sacrament, under whatever theological label it appears, which separates the act of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ from the act of nailing one's life to the Cross, that the new priestly life of consecration and sacrifice may be born in us, is condemned already. The new life can only be gained through the death of the old; it can only be maintained by the continual impartation of Christ's own life to us. To disjoin what are really two complementary elements of one act is to misunderstand the nature of the Gospel. It is this violent disjunction that has alienated so many from the Sacrament. They have come to connect everything that is active, virile and heroic in the Christian life with the Cross, and everything that is passive, feminine and quietist

with the Altar. In reality, the two are indissolubly one. It is the Christian soldier who receives his viaticum for the long campaign, not of death but of life ; it is the penitent, hungering soul, comforted and reinforced, who is ready to be crucified daily with Christ. " It is only the life of the Incarnate God within us that makes us priests ; it is His priesthood, His mediation, that expresses itself through us. The individual self as such is not a priest. Self can represent nothing but self. And therefore self must be killed and given up whole and entire, like the whole burnt-offering on the altar, in order that there may be nothing in us but Christ, nothing left in us but priesthood." * It is not merely that the Altar presupposes the Cross ; it is equally true that the Cross, in its subjective application, would tend to breed that subtle self-exaltation which lurks in all self-sacrifice, were it not wedded to the Altar. It is not in virtue of the strength we draw from our self-crucifixion, but by our daily feeding upon a Life not our own, that we are made priests unto God and men.

From the men who have fought and from the men who face grim responsibilities at home, from the minds of thinkers and from the hearts of the poor, there comes the demand for a form of worship which shall not merely be an incoherent and unprogressive medley of hymns,

* A. H. McNeile, "Discipleship," p. 116.

prayers, and readings, but a purposeful, closely knit procession culminating in a sacramental act. Men and women are tired of services which seem to them to lead nowhere. Many especially who were nurtured in the Free Churches crave for a devotional service in which the minister —adopting the suggestion of so convinced a Free Churchman as Principal Forsyth—shall pray in the only position in which he too can truly worship, that is, on a level with, and facing the same way as, the people. Such a change of position may seem a slight matter, but it symbolises a whole continent of religious conviction and feeling. A devotional service in which the minister really prays simply and earnestly as one of the people is incompatible with the literary type of prayer, which has been the bane of Free Church worship, and with ambitious or pretentious sermonising, or rather essay-reading. It naturally and inevitably leads to a sacramental worship. We are often inclined to judge the average worshipper harshly, saying that he listens to rather than joins in the prayers, and that his only object in following the sermon is to see whether the preacher agrees with him. This may be largely true; but as long as so many pulpit prayers invite literary appreciation rather than devotional sincerity, and so many sermons are clever statements of opinion, or attractive interpretations of the preacher's mood, rather than words of witness or prophecy, so long will

this attitude have some degree of justification. In the end there is only one remedy—to make Holy Communion the chief Sunday service.

The Altar is the supreme witness to the sovereignty of the Cross over the whole of life. Bunyan introduces the Cross near the beginning of Christian's pilgrimage, as the place where the burden of sin rolls off the pilgrim's back and is seen no more—reintroducing it at later stages merely as a ground of confidence and a refuge in times of despondency or relapse. But the power of the Cross is not thus to be confined. It is the root principle of our new life in God from beginning to end—its revealing light as well as its consuming fire, the secret of its beauty as well as the source of its strength. Above all, it is the soul of prayer. Three-fourths of our difficulties about prayer would vanish if we took as the normative type of prayer, not the spasmodic cry that is wrung from the average soul in hours of distress, nor the easy, habitual prayers of the constitutionally pious, or of those who were trained in a tradition of daily prayers, but rather the prayer that is specifically Christian. Such prayer can only be learnt at the Cross, and can only be sustained at the Altar. It is a profound and exacting act of self-giving, and therefore has nothing to do with that glib devotional utterance we sometimes call a " gift of prayer. " It is possible for a person thus endowed to pray with daily increasing ease and fervour and yet

to be daily slipping farther away from reality, because all the time he is praying "outside his soul," as it were. His prayer and his real self are curiously disjoined, and the ease with which he glides from the troubled waters of mundane activity into the calm haven of devotion conceals the fatal hiatus from him. But true prayer always comes hard, for it is the expression of the crucified life. It is itself one long crucifixion. Its strength lies not in its liberties, but in its restraints—in the long, dumb hours when the soul is held in dryness and emptiness, until the pain of self-knowledge and the longing for a God who hides Himself dilate the heart to contain the larger revelation, the new call, which God is waiting to give. Such prayer is not a matter of temperament; it depends, not on a man's devotional tastes, but on his willingness to face reality and endure its searching inquisition.

The Altar reminds us that prayer is a priestly act—a sacrifice in which priest and victim are one. To-day we are groping our way to a deeper recognition of the nature and force of intercession; but while true prayer will always end in intercession, its primary motive is to unite the soul with Him who is the source of all benefits. The popular objection that it is selfish to pray so much for one's own soul shows how little we have divined the secret of true priesthood. As well say that it was selfish of the woman at Bethany to pour the spikenard over the feet

of Jesus, instead of selling it and giving the money to the poor. A false altruism is threatening to cut the very nerve of true Christian love. The great saints of past ages did not think of themselves, or of self-improvement, when they spilt their hearts as water unto God; they only thought of Him, they only sought expression for the deep instinct of love which urged them to give their all. And out of their unreserved self-giving to the Lover of their souls there grew a love of men beside which our present-day philanthropy seems cold and thin. Our current conception of true intercession resolves itself into a putting of ourselves into our neighbour's place in the sight of God, thinking of his sorrows, trying to realise his difficulties, looking at things from his point of view, till we can pray for him as if we were praying for ourselves. This is excellent, of course; but it is not "the one thing needful." The priestly prayer learnt at the Altar is, first and foremost, a putting of oneself, not in the place of one's neighbours, but in the place of Christ, seeking communion with Him in His sorrow and shame for man's sin, in His compassion—so different from the shallow pity of our own hearts—and in His amazing designs for man's true happiness. Until the soul of our intercession becomes, not merely the repeating of a list of names and needs in a spirit of fellow-feeling, but a self-offering to God—a crucifying, not merely of our selfishness, but of

our shallowness, that we may indeed fill up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ, and be true priests unto our brethren—it must remain feeble.

It is told of a certain mediæval saint that her reputation for holiness was so great that people crowded to her, asking her prayers for them. She listened to their requests, but promptly forgot all about them—so absorbed was she in the contemplation of the Passion of Christ. Great was her surprise, therefore, when every day brought those who came to thank her for the benefits received through her prayers. But as she pondered this strange thing, she suddenly understood. She had been so closely united to the Source of help and healing—it would have been strange if none of it had overflowed upon those she had forgotten for no selfish reason. Which thing is a parable, for the Church as well as for the soul. Until we have the courage to restore the Cross and the Altar to their primary and central place in our life, we shall remain ineffective among men, and most ineffective in prayer. To regard prayer, as we so often tend to do, as a sympathetic, or rather telepathic, exercise used with altruistic ends, is fatal. It is either communion with God, or it is nothing; and until our supreme passion is once more the desire to have communion with God in the love that sent Jesus to the Cross, and in the Broken Body and the Blood outpoured for our redeeming, we have not even begun to understand Christianity.

# *PART III*

# THE GREAT ADVENTURE

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEED FOR AN ADVENTUROUS THEOLOGY

Our mental habit leads us to connect the spirit of adventure with action but deny it to thought; to seek it in the Mission-field and scorn to look for it in the study. That thought is also a risky business and demands a stout heart no less than action, is about the last thing we are willing to believe. Yet it ought not to be very hard to realise it; in the sphere of practical morals, at any rate, it is abundantly obvious. Here is a man given over to self-indulgence or greed, or to the lust of getting on in the world. He is not a bad man at heart; he is simply one of the thousands who take the line of least resistance, following their natural bent. If only he would take time to think! One long look at his life in the face of the great realities—love, honour, death—would suffice to make a different man of him; one honest, brave piece of thinking would shatter his world of delusions about his ears. But he shirks the task. His mind is encrusted with prejudices, his conscience vitiated by shoddy motives and petty equivocations, his emotions strangled by the fungus-growth of selfishness. To clear such an accumulation of

moral rubbish away and determine to see things as they really are, demands more courage than he can comfortably muster. It also involves considerable risk, for it might end in the discovery that in his deepest heart he really *preferred* purity to self-gratification; really believed that honour was better than gain, and a clear conscience than attained ambition. And once he realised that, he would be involved in a struggle between his base and his true self which only death could end. Small wonder that he flees thought of this kind, until he has lost the very power of thinking.

But if this is true in the sphere of practical morals, it must be as true in the realm of that spiritual life which gives to morality its highest significance. For the spiritual life is not a static, but a kinetic, force. It is a history of absorbing interest and momentous import. Like the moral life, it demands brave, patient thinking with a view to right action. In no sphere is it easier to let reality slip, and to move in a world of shadows without knowing it; nowhere has self-deception a more favourable breeding-ground. And it is one of the most important functions of theology to keep the soul and the Church awake to reality, and to rouse them anew when they have yielded to the poppy vapour of self-delusion. This may seem quite beside the mark to those who look upon theology as merely a traditional formulation of belief and a theoretical

discussion of conflicting views. Such a theology has certainly no vital power to change anything. But if theology means the constant re-thinking of the fundamental realities of faith in the light of present need and experience; if it means the kind of thinking about God and His purposes in virtue of which our spiritual existence is a *history*, and not a mere succession of moods and emotions, then it is an adventurous undertaking, and one that can turn worlds upside down, in exactly the same way as half an hour's honest thinking in practical ethics can change the life of a debauchee or a money-grabber.

Take the case of a man who has suddenly awakened to the mediocrity and feebleness, the utter unreality, of his religious life. He sits down to think. The first idea that happens to float into his mind is the initial affirmation of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." He knows that, cold as the creeds seem to us to-day, they express the most passionate convictions of those who framed them. He remembers having been told in connection with another creed, the Nicene, that in that day the very shopkeepers and artisans discussed the metaphysics of the Person of Christ. And this leads him to reason within himself somewhat after this fashion: "What did these words mean to the men whose faith they originally expressed—men so different

from myself in a thousand ways, yet having the same deep needs, the same desires, passions and sorrows? Many of them died that this faith might be handed down to me, so the least I can do is to try and get some idea of what it really meant to them. And perhaps this may help me to get at the meaning of it all for me to-day. Do I really believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and what precisely do I understand by the terms 'Father' and 'Maker'? And if I do believe in God as my Creator and Father, how about my life? How is it that I am eaten up with worry and anxiety, that I am afraid—yes, 'afraid' is the word—of everything that can hurt me? How is it that I grasp at things which a child of the great Father and Maker of heaven and earth has no business to covet at all, and that I am so easily tempted to fretfulness and meanness? Perhaps it is because I don't really believe in Him, after all. But if so, what *do* I really believe?" And here the serious business of thinking begins. The process may be of the simplest and most elementary kind, and the man who puts himself through this mill may never have read a theological treatise; yet he is to that extent a theologian, and a far sounder theologian than the mere theoretical expert.

# Need for an Adventurous Theology

## I

Now theology thus applied—and such an application, so far from belittling the scientific work of the professional theologian, gives it its true place as a power-house of Christian thought—is a great adventure. The thing we need to fear above all else is a "safe" theology. Nor is the cult of "safety" in theological thinking confined to definitely orthodox quarters. There is to-day a good deal of theologising in the name of freedom which is afraid of the adventurous heart of Christianity, and shrinks from antagonising contemporary prejudices and life-habits as timidly as traditional theologians shrink from disturbing the uncritical acceptance of "official" dogmas. There is a common type of theology which takes a somewhat swaggering attitude towards what it calls "the ghosts of a dead past," but is quite remarkably meek and apologetic in the face of the dislikes and prepossessions of an unheroic present. The microbe of safety has always affected theology, and what we are pleased to call obscurantism has very often been the outcome, not of a rigidly conservative conviction, but of a frantic desire to save the Church at all costs, and to secure historical institutions against invasion, whether from critical "Barbarians" without or from the working of the Spirit within. And still in many ways, subtle

and overt, we tend to make "Safety first" our theological motto, working out our thought of God with an eye upon existing institutions and prevailing prejudices, and so infecting the whole life of the Church with cowardice and mediocrity.

It is not the speculative theologian who is most likely to succumb to this temptation. He has his own dangers to face. He is apt to lose touch with the facts of life, and to think *in vacuo*. But while it may be a futile thing to sit upon the edge of a cloud and pretend the world does not exist, no one could possibly call it safe; and the genuinely speculative theologian always has something of the explorer's courage in his composition. It is the teacher who works out his theology with the Church and the needs of the average churchgoer in view who will most frequently be tempted to put safety before truth, on the plea that vital needs come before correct theories, and that it is more important for the Church to be preserved alive than for it to possess the highest possible conception of its function and message. The tendency is always to work upon the principle that "he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day," and to remind ourselves that the Church that dies a victim to its own ideals exchanges the chance of being an efficient, if somewhat defective, working force for the pale and pathetic halo of ineffective martyrdom. Besides, there is the

thing we call historical continuity to be considered. To break historical continuity would be not merely a suicidal but a blasphemous policy, and a Church that adopted an adventurous theology and followed it up by an equally adventurous practice might easily break that continuity by the simple process of becoming defunct, since average humanity is scarcely ripe for membership in so uncomfortable a body. That the death of the Church in its present form would no more do away with real historical continuity than the chrysalis stage breaks the continuity of a butterfly's development, does not seem to occur to these apostles of safety. The Church that can face the new age with confidence and power is not a Church that cares about historical continuity, in the commonly accepted sense of that term, but a Church that is prepared to die; and that not because she is doctrinaire and thinks more of theories than of life, but, on the contrary, because of her passionate belief in the only life worth having—the life that can be crucified and buried and rise again on the third day. Whenever the doctrine of the Divine Adventure which lies at the root of Christianity is weakened or modified in the supposed interests of life, it is because the life aimed at is *not* the free life of the Spirit. True life cannot be insured against "accidents" by theological safety devices. To put safety first is to put life last, if indeed there is any life left worth considering. A

system of safety that absolves life from adventuring is the deadliest conspiracy against life.

An interesting study which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* a year or two back treats of this peril in dramatic form. It tells of two lovers eager to marry, but held back by prudential considerations advanced by themselves and by their respective families. Vague objections are made, based not upon definite facts, but upon the general insecurity of life. The tacit demand is for insurance against every possible evil that might overtake these young people. But of all that depressing company one man—the father of the young girl—sees life with different eyes. He is a convict, and his remarks to the young man, who visits him in prison to ask for the hand of his daughter, are worth quoting :—

" They haven't the point of view. It's life that is the great adventure. Not marriage, not business. They are just chapters in the book. The main thing is to take the road fearlessly—to have courage to live one's life. . . . That is the great word. Don't you see what ails your father's point of view, and my wife's ? One wants absolute security in one way for Ruth ; the other wants absolute security in another way for you. And security—why it's just the one thing a human being cannot have, the thing that's the damnation of him if he gets it ! The reason it is so hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is that he has that false sense of security. To demand it just disintegrates a man. I don't know why—it does. . . .

The mastery of life comes with the knowledge of our power to endure. That's it. You are safe only when you can stand everything that can happen to you. Thus and thus only! Endurance is the measure of the man. . . . Courage is security. There is no other kind."

It is the practical theologian's craving for a security other than that of courage to follow the guidance of God's Spirit that has largely contributed to the alienation of thoughtful men and women from the Churches. The theological terminology of bygone ages, devoid of real meaning, let alone of religious value, to the mind of to-day, is retained, not merely in most of our popular religious teaching, but also in our public worship; and the motive is always to supply a safeguard for "the deposit of faith," and to preserve a sense of historical continuity. We are told that to make any radical change would be to incur the danger of losing our precious heritage of Christian doctrine, and killing our ancient institutions. Of course, there is danger —there must be danger, so long as life itself remains the superbly dangerous experience it is—but the peril is no greater than that which threatened the Christian heritage when St. Paul took the Gospel to the Gentiles, subjecting the Apostolic tradition to the influences of pagan thought, translating the Gospel of the Kingdom into terms of a world-religion, and planting the Church where it would be moulded by the

impact of Roman institutionalism. If Christianity not only survived that ordeal, but was universalised by it and planted deep in the heart of mankind; if it survived the later ordeal of Reformation times, emerging from it with twice-broken fetters, why need we fear to risk it yet again in the name of Jesus and His Gospel? There is only one thing to fear, indeed—the stagnation and desiccation which spell death. If, duped by our timidity, we persist in allowing inadequate conceptions of God and His service to determine our thought and worship, antiquated methods to hamper our work, and effete institutions to imperil our souls, the Church of the near future will be safely—dead.

Nor is theological liberalism the cure for this timidity. Theological liberalism may be, and sometimes is, as tame and tepid, as concerned about established institutions, and as afraid of adventure as any orthodoxy could be. Even present-day theological liberalism not infrequently shows a concern for the preservation of the Church as by law established which is curiously reminiscent both of eighteenth-century Rationalism and of orthodox Moderatism. With a curious failure to appreciate the great fundamental doctrines of Christianity in their historical development, it often combines an illogical anxiety to preserve the institutions which presuppose them. Theological liberalism has, in fact, remained largely Victorian in its outlook; and it is significant

that not one of the adventurous Christian movements of recent times, such as the Student Movement, the Free Church and Anglican Fellowships, the Collegium, etc., has originated with theological liberalism. With hardly any exception, these movements have been inspired by the representatives of a positive, constructive Christian faith, centred in Christ as the Saviour and Lord of men, and in His Cross as the symbol of redemption and the only way of life. It is not a liberal theology which is our supreme need to-day, but a theology that is absolutely fearless in interpreting the Gospel to our generation, and in pressing its daring consequences home upon the conscience of all Christians—a theology, in short, that prefers reality to safety. We need not be astonished when plain folk view the modernist with suspicion. There is, of course, a candid and courageous modernism which has done great service in theology; but we have had far too much of a less desirable type that ranged itself with the most conservative and obscurantist defenders of antiquated and unspiritual institutions, because these institutions allow a cold, intellectual modernism to exist undisturbed, but have scant tolerance for an aggressive supernaturalism which happens to be profoundly spiritual. Professor Percy Gardner gives a shrewd characterisation of this school which, while not explicitly Erastian, lauds the practical effect of the Establishment in maintaining within the

Church that equable, reasonable and unruffled atmosphere in which a liberal theology can flourish unhindered. "A limited degree of State regulation," says this type of modernist, "keeps a Church sound and healthy, saves it from excesses and unreality, and secures in it the dominance of common sense. An Anglican clergyman, though he must keep to the Liturgy, is very free in his teaching; he is responsible in the long run only to secular Courts which are very tolerant in their interpretation of Church formulæ. The control of Bishops is very discreet, and Bishops, being nominated by the Prime Minister, are nearly always men of moderation and tact. . . In a time of interregnum, when religious beliefs are passing from one stage to another, it is far the best to have a system in which external regularity and decency are enforced but views are not investigated." *

Modernists of this school cheerfully submit to a form of worship which for the unsophisticated layman is in direct contradiction to the "liberal" doctrine preached from the pulpit, so long as the Church remains amenable only to a secular authority which stands for "the dominance of common sense," and is very tolerant (should it not rather be wholly indifferent?) in its interpretation of Church formulæ. That to be safeguarded by the theological ignorance and spiritual indifference of secular Courts, or by the discreet

* "Evolution in Christian Doctrine," pp. 228, 232, 233.

tactfulness of Bishops nominated by the Crown, is the very worst thing that could happen to modernism, or indeed to any other type of Christian thinking; that, on the contrary, the most fanatical and prejudiced ecclesiastical Court, *provided its interests were spiritual*, is infinitely preferable to such "tolerance," does not seem to occur to them.

One is aware, of course, that many modernists set their hopes upon the gradual, subterranean leavening of popular religion with enlightened conceptions under cover of an ecclesiastical policy of *laissez faire*. But is it really of first importance that the general religious mind should be leavened with a sufficient number of enlightened conceptions? There is ample room for the leavening process in Christian teaching, but it can never take the place of the more direct and Apostolic method. For the characteristic thing about Christianity is that the manner of receiving it is as important as the content of that which is received, that the How is as momentous as the What. To accept Christianity with a free, brave, passionate soul that is prepared to witness to its profession even to the laying down of life if need be, and to make experience of the new way to the uttermost of peril, opposition and contempt, is the one thing needful, and not the existence of a system which renders these qualities superfluous and, indeed, views them as a lapse from that "common sense" which is the idol

of this type of modernism. No safeguarded theology, no amount of incubation with enlightened views behind the scenes, will meet the demands of an age which, with all its faults, has come to realise that unless religion is a huge risk it is nothing. At the heart of the Gospel is the Cross of Jesus, and whatever our theology may be, we know that the Cross does not stand for "the predominance of common sense." We know that it was not to save the Church from "excesses" that Jesus died. We know that the Cross commits Christ's servants to something far other than "a peaceful propagation of enlightened views" under the ægis of an orthodox liturgy and a tolerant Episcopate. It means, to say the very least, loyalty to a Captain who cares nothing at all for safety and everything for reality. Jesus was not a wary and prudent reformer of popular religion. He was the Divine Prodigal of love, spending His substance "riotously" to His last drop of blood.

II

An adventurous theology will insist that this central fact of Christianity—the prodigal self-spending Love of God and its demands upon us—be interpreted in the Church's formulæ and find expression in her worship and life. It cannot stop short of a declaration of faith and a form of public worship which bear clear and

adequate witness to it. The traditional creeds and formulæ bear no such witness. Instead of setting forth Jesus and saying, "God is like *that!*" they first define God the Father in terms of Greek metaphysics and Roman legalism, and then declare that the Son is co-equal with Him. Nor is this the language of the creeds merely: it stands for a conception of God which is stamped upon the Church's worship, and obscures the meaning of Christianity for the common people from childhood up. In the case of the Church of England Prayer Book, revision has become a primary necessity; and it is a matter for regret that the present movement towards revision is organised in the interests of sacerdotal convictions, neither evangelicals nor modernists being apparently concerned about securing a revision on non-sacerdotal lines. It is surprising indeed to find so vigorous and thoughtful a representative of progressive evangelicalism as Mr. Charles E. Raven expressing the view that the movement towards revision is untimely, and its promoters blind to the real issues of the hour, characterising it as the action of men who "have used the present as an occasion for airing their peculiar fads instead of devoting themselves to the Gospel of the love of Jesus." Such a movement, he thinks, will contribute nothing to the ingathering of the lapsed masses, since "it is not the 'hard sayings' of our doctrines, or the archaic phrases of our liturgy, which drive men to reject Christ,

but the un-Christian and loveless lives of His followers."* There is surely some confusion here. In pressing for a revision of doctrinal standards and forms of worship on the score of their inadequacy to express and render intelligible the deepest thing in Christianity, we do not for a moment imply that the lack of such revision "drives men to reject Christ," but simply that it keeps them from darkening our church doors. And since the Church was made for man, and a Church whose Common Prayer obscures and enfeebles her witness to Jesus has lost her *raison d'être*, we count it our duty to give ourselves no rest until our worship and our convictions be in full accord. To urge that it is our lovelessness that keeps people from joining our fellowship is beside the mark. Prayer-Book revision cannot be conceived as hindering, or even as retarding, the growth of love among us; on the contrary, by giving us forms which express the fundamental realities of the Gospel, it would make every service a call and an inspiration to love, instead of a recital of dead theological formulæ. The majority of those outside the Anglo-Catholic party (as well as of many inside it) who demand Prayer-Book revision do so precisely because they are striving to fulfil the law of love, and desire to find expression for their deepest convictions in public worship.

While it is deplorably true that the loveless-

* "What think ye of Christ?" pp. 234–5.

ness which is our practical denial of the Gospel has misrepresented Christ to thousands who might otherwise have become His disciples, it is no less true that many children of the Church *who have seen Church life not at its worst but at its best* are outside the Church to-day, because they found nothing in her services and teaching to correspond to their spiritual needs. They cherish happy memories of the Christian fellowship in which they were nurtured; they look back wistfully to their childhood, with its warm, simple faith, its golden Sundays, its wonderful reverence for the House of God. But though they *look* back with tender eyes, it does not occur to them to *turn* back. It is not that they have lost grip of religion. They are often passionate advocates of the Christian ethic, and in most cases feel that there is something behind that ethic which is even more vital—something they cannot formulate, but which they know centres in the Person of Jesus. They would like to penetrate into that mystery, but cannot see for the life of them what the liturgy of the Church contributes to its elucidation. It moves in a world shadowy and remote; its language conveys little to them. In the days of their youth they had accepted the conventional explanation of the theological terms with which it bristles, but there came a time when these explanations were seen to be a process of defining one unknown by another. They felt themselves caught in a

vicious circle of metaphors and abstract terms having no relation that they could see to that central Figure which seemed so tremendously alive to them in their best hours, and became so dead when reduced to the cut-and-dried formulæ of Patristic theology. Surely the Church has a grave duty towards such—a duty which our inveterate habit of viewing theology under the categories of "orthodox" and "heterodox" has largely hidden from our eyes. The first question to ask concerning any dogma of the Church is not whether it conforms, or does not conform, to orthodox standards, but whether it serves to reveal or to obscure the Figure of the Living Christ. For thousands of willing souls Christ lies buried in a grave of theological subtleties. It is for us to roll away the stones, not to dispute about the inscriptions upon them.

Two opposite ideals of Churchmanship have divided our leaders into hostile camps, the controversy reaching its height when the popularisation of the results of critical scholarship made many to tremble for the Ark of God. One school insists upon a tender regard for Christ's little ones, and a scrupulous avoidance of any statement that would shock the simple faith of aged believers. The other contends that consideration for those easily offended is not the teacher's only duty; he has to take thought not merely for those within the Church whose faith might reel

under the overthrow of cherished theological traditions, but also for those who keep aloof from the Church because of its alleged adherence to those traditions. It is not only towards the Church of the present, but towards the Church of the future, that he is responsible. What avails his "economy" of new conceptions, if in conciliating the old folk it alienates young life, and, indeed, makes Church membership difficult for unborn generations?

Both these positions have their justification, and both have been abused by their defenders. The solution of the difficulty lies in retaining a right conception of the nature of the Church. The Church is not an association of amateur theologians; it is a family, in which old and young, learned and simple, bold and timid, form one organic whole. Its family character is its glory; there is nothing of that sectional or eclectic atmosphere about it that makes a New Thought meeting, for instance, such an artificial and melancholy business. Its unifying centre is a living Person; its uniting link is mutual love. In such a family it is possible to achieve what would be impossible in any eclectic sect or cult—a teaching and a worship in which all its members find their place, and none is offended or wronged. Wherever Christ Himself, and not a set of doctrines about Him, is made the centre of a Church, the scribe may bring forth from his treasury both the new and the old. Such a

Church will care little for theological labels, but everything for the maintenance of a clear, experimental witness to its Lord. Its theology will not be stagnant or traditional, but neither will it be reckless or flippant. It will be, in the truest sense, an adventurous theology; for it will submit, not merely the new, but the old also, to the test of the Life that is the light of men. It will commit itself to no school or party, but dare to follow the Spirit's leading in its thinking as well as in its practical work. Theological catchwords, however "advanced," are the stock-in-trade of the timid and the mediocre. The true adventurer of faith goeth forth not knowing whither he goeth. He knows his Captain; he does not ask to see the name of the road.

## III

The temptation to make a bid for theological safety is by no means confined to theologians. In subtler form it is found in quarters where theology is somewhat at a discount, and it is not seldom most effectual when its presence is least suspected. A vivid exemplification of this tendency is afforded by the late lamented Donald Hankey's inimitable portraiture of an average layman who has come to the conclusion that it is "up to him" to be a Churchman.* He comes to Communion, saying in his heart, "Lord Jesus, I want to be a bit

* In "Faith or Fear?" pp. 23–27.

of Thee. I want to show a little bit of Thee to the world. I want to offer Thee my body, to be a member of Thy Body, that it may show to the world a little of Thy Spirit." He then goes to the clergyman, who discovers that he has never been baptised. "I'm glad of this, Padre," he says, "it's a chance to get things square. I want to stand up before you and my witnesses, and to say quite plainly that I desire to fight beneath the Cross, the standard of Jesus Christ, that I want to be a member of His Body, and to do my bit towards showing Him to the world. I want to say that I don't believe in selfishness and material ambition, and that I do believe in goodness and honesty and love and freedom." But when the clergyman reads to him the Service for Baptism of Such as be of Riper Years, he becomes alarmed. "This is awfully long-winded," he says. "What exactly do you mean by 'mystical washing away,' 'spiritual regeneration,' 'elect children,' 'everlasting salvation,' and being 'damned'? And do you really believe in the resurrection of the flesh, because I'm hanged if I do." And when the clergyman tries to initiate him a little into what he believes to be a reasonable man's attitude towards those things, he is far from satisfied. "That's all very well," he objects; "but here am I at the most important moment of my life, when I am trying to make a clean start, and I have got to make a public confession of faith with all sorts of mental reserva-

tions. I don't like it. Why can't I say straight out what you and I really do believe ? " In the end he decides that it is worth while to equivocate a little in order to gain the spiritual fellowship he so much desires, and so this average man becomes a Churchman. But he is far from happy in his new life. The Church services worry him by their apparent irrelevance and insincerity ; the preaching he hears generally seems " off the point " ; above all, the lack of fellowship distresses him, and the extraordinary keenness of " good " Churchmen about questions of ritual and theology which seem to him of infinite unimportance.

But while Mr. Hankey's picture is true to the life, his interpretation of the facts—an interpretation characteristic of a whole school of thought—is marred by a confusion which lands him in the very attitude he would most vehemently repudiate. He rightly contends that if the Church is indeed to be the Body of Christ among men, its standards, forms of worship, and rules of procedure must be such as to express in simple, unequivocal fashion the faith and aspiration of the average man who is not a theologian or an ecclesiastic, and who honestly desires " to show a bit of Jesus to the world." But in proceeding upon the assumption that, in order to fulfil this condition, the Church must submit her formularies and rites to the judgment of the average man, he does less than justice to both. The Church

exists not merely, or even chiefly, for the average man as he is, but rather for the man he is to become through a long process of discipleship. If the average man has the right to expect his first inarticulate gropings after a new life to find expression in the Church's worship and teaching, have the saint and the mystic no right to demand that their deeper experience should also find a voice in its witness? If the first crude intuitions of the newly awakened must be reflected in its ordinances, may not the mature disciple expect a similar recognition of his profounder apprehension of truth? The Church is not a religious club for the average man, or indeed for any other type of man; nor is it merely the organised expression of the totality of the faith and convictions of any given age. It is a reservoir filled with the results of the spiritual strivings and triumphs of two thousand years. It enshrines an experience which even its greatest saints have not fully explored; and it calls the average man to that experience, knowing that it was to average men that Christ committed His cause, that it was average men He called to drink of His cup and be baptised with His baptism.

Writers of Mr. Hankey's theological leanings tend to include under one category the average man's difficulties about such conceptions as "mystical washing away," "spiritual regeneration," and "elect children," and his difficulties about such matters as the Virgin Birth. But

the two classes are in reality entirely disparate. The first set of ideas, while expressed in a terminology which needs elucidation, represents vital processes, which the average man who is a true disciple has already experienced in part, and is intended to grow in day by day. They are therefore of tremendous importance for him, even though they appear unnecessarily puzzling at this early stage. To allow him to shelve them on the very threshold of discipleship as so much technical lumber, would be a betrayal of the teacher's trust. It is otherwise with the second class of ideas. They presuppose a nurture in Christian thinking, a trained sense of doctrinal values, and a delicate feeling for valid traditions which a neophyte coming into the Church straight from the outside cannot possibly have. To thrust them upon his unprepared mind at the threshold of initiation is to imperil his future. He must be allowed to postpone dogmatic questions until he has grown sufficiently into the spirit of Christianity to understand their import. They presuppose and demand an atmosphere in which he is not yet acclimatised. It is for want of recognising this that so many preachers and writers, especially since the war, have been betrayed into an ill-considered and almost hysterical demand for the removal of all dogmatic formulations from the Church's creeds and worship. Such a demand is futile. Doctrinal statement is an intellectual necessity;

and if the average man is repelled by it, the obvious remedy, and indeed the only true wisdom, is to make it clear to him that the consideration of dogmatic questions belongs to a later stage of his development. To convince him of this may be difficult ; but since when has the Church been commissioned to avoid the path of difficulty, and to aim at securing herself against the risk of being misunderstood ? The average man will probably not relish being told to postpone his dogmatic investigations, and take the suggestion as yet another proof of the incurable sophistry of a clerical caste. Well—that must be borne with equanimity. A tone of superiority is certainly out of place. After all, few of us can aspire to be more than average men, or rather, there is fortunately no such thing as the monstrosity labelled " the average man." Each man's approach to Christianity is peculiar to himself, and each has his own contribution to bring to the common stock of Christian thinking and living. But using the term in its conventional signification to denote the man who comes to the Christian life from the outside with neither training nor inheritance of mature traditions to aid him, we must not allow our sympathy to blind us to our duty. Our duty is not to vindicate ourselves at every step to his immature judgment, but to impress it upon him in all brotherliness and humility that in joining the Church he has committed himself to a fellow-

ship of instruction as well as to a fellowship of service, and that his vow of discipleship pledges him to seek a growing apprehension of Divine truth.

## IV

As we have seen already, it would be disastrous if the new and welcome emphasis upon discipleship were construed by the Church as a substitute for the duty of working out a theology as vital and relevant to the thought of our age as the theology of the Nicene Fathers was to theirs. To-day as never before, the Church realises the difficulty of such a task, and on every hand she is being betrayed into the vicious process of "marking time," on the plea that the moral and spiritual demands of discipleship and the urgency of social reform have prior claims upon her energy. But that is a fatal policy, and will not stand examination for a moment. True discipleship carries within itself the imperative demand for that new thought of God we have discussed elsewhere, and no amount of social activity can reconcile men of to-day to the fact that the Church is shirking her specific business. Men everywhere are thinking about God as they have never thought before, and are more impatient and resentful than ever they were before against a Church that refuses to address herself to the issues which perplex them, and tries to put them off with the cut-and-dried formulæ of bygone

ages, or with the specious excuse that personal holiness or social service is of far more immediate importance. We need a race of Christian teachers and preachers who are not afraid to go behind the creeds to the New Testament and the collective Christian consciousness, and to work through the fundamental facts and conceptions of Christianity, treating them as living questions, and not as matters which the fourth century has settled for all the ages to come. We want a theology that has due reverence both for the past and for the present, but which is neither antiquarian nor ephemeral—a theology born of personal vision and insight, yet never merely subjective because rooted deep in the history of the Church's growing initiation into the truth. It is only as we are striving after such a theology ourselves and, fearlessly facing the original problems of Christianity, seek to interpret the historical creeds afresh in the light of a new age, that we may, with a clear conscience, ask the average man to postpone his own consideration of these matters to a later stage. And it is because the average man suspects that our advice to him is merely a subterfuge to cover our own intellectual laziness and timidity, if not downright incompetence, that he refuses to accept it. It is an authentic Christian instinct that bids us put discipleship, and not assent to dogma, in the forefront ; but the moment we acknowledge that it is a man's personal allegiance to Christ as his

Lord and Saviour, and not his theology, that is of primary importance, we thereby pledge ourselves to reconstruct our theology, and re-interpret the Church's creed in accordance with this central conviction. In other words, we put ourselves under solemn obligation to take our Lord's words, "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father," seriously, making it the fundamental axiom of our theological reconstruction, and seeking to interpret God to the mind of our age, not in terms of Greek metaphysics, but in terms of Jesus Christ.

This takes us back to the neglected truism that the teaching function of the Church is essential to her very existence. Unless that function is recovered speedily, she will find herself plunged into endless difficulties during the period of reconstruction now before us. She will soon be confronted with men who have had a vital religious experience in the trenches, and who found in the camp services something that really corresponded to that experience—something they can understand and appreciate and *feel*—in sharp contrast to the dull, unintelligible, decorous services they yawned through (or avoided) at home. Many of these men will wish to connect themselves more closely with the Church, and this will imply a legitimate demand for a change in her services. But woe unto us if we interpret that demand as a call to make our services as superficially attractive and intellectually thread-

bare as the men find agreeable at this initial stage. The first thing to do is to make them realise that Christianity is a bigger thing than they thought, that it takes long growing into, and that the things they understand and care for least now may prove a year or two hence to meet their deepest needs, and fit their most vital instincts as the key fits the lock. Christianity exists to make the average man something far other than average; to make of him a saint, a mystic, an experimental believer, a priestly intercessor—something, in short, that shall in very deed "show a bit of Christ to the world." One of the outstanding marks of vital Christianity is its power to confer upon apparently commonplace and poorly educated people the distinction of a penetrative spiritual intelligence. Every now and again one meets in crowded city streets, as well as in far-away mountain glens, humble toilers who, in plain and homely speech, discourse upon the things of the Spirit with a breadth of outlook and a keenness of discernment that are at once an inspiration and a rebuke. Without knowing it, they have by long and patient pondering attained to a degree of mental concentration and a clarity of spiritual perception which many a highly educated man might envy. Few of them have ever opened a learned book, yet they are skilled dialecticians of the soul, deep seers into Eternity; and many a scholarly Apollos has gone to school to some illuminated Aquila

and Priscilla, and received his degree in Divine philosophy at their toil-worn hands.

The Church is not merely a kindly spiritual home for average men, providing the sort of services they can appreciate, the sort of teaching they can understand, and the sort of fellowship that makes Church life attractive for them. She ought to meet every legitimate need—it is especially to her shame that she has so largely failed to create that warm atmosphere of fellowship for which men rightly crave—but her supreme function is not so much to satisfy felt needs as to open men's eyes to the deeper needs of which they have hitherto been unconscious. It is her duty to tell them that it is not by the homely kindness and comradeship that is already characteristic of them—beautiful though that be—but by the deeper, sacrificial communion of the broken Body and the shed Blood that they will become true soldiers of Jesus Christ and builders of His Kingdom. If she has hitherto failed through ignoring the average man, she is threatening to fail once more at this critical hour by sinking to his level. There are signs on every hand that, in her anxiety to win him at all costs, she is being betrayed into giving him the free and easy sing-song, the slipshod and offensively familiar prayer, the cheap, crude, slangy sermon, when she should be bringing to him the sanctuary, the altar, the subduing, recreating mystery of godliness by which men live and grow into the

likeness of God. Nothing is gained by the growing custom of turning the mysteries of faith into the subject of a flippant "undress" debate, or of a much-placarded sensational sermon. We may imagine that by so doing we are liberating them from their hampering crust of conventionality and superstitious reverence; in reality, we are only cheapening and vulgarising them. To study the titles of certain popular religious books and pamphlets, or the placards which disgrace many a church door, is to be haunted by the suspicion that, in the vigour of our new crusade for reaching the average man, we are losing our sense of the sanctity of sacred things without gaining in either honesty or influence. Do we really imagine that such mysteries as the Incarnation, the Divinity of Christ, or the Life Beyond become less difficult and more convincing by being trafficked with in the market-place and fingered by every passer-by, or that intellectual honesty and courage are promoted by such a course? One's experience of such methods would rather lead one to say that nothing could more effectively prevent honest thinking and fearless investigation than such a procedure. The average man, after listening to an address in which, say, the question of the Virgin Birth is disposed of in a smart, gaily iconoclastic manner, may be agreeably impressed by the fact that, after all, the parson seems to think very much the same as he himself does; but it is extremely unlikely that such a sermon

will induce him to approach the Incarnation one whit more thoughtfully and honestly than before—the likelihood is that he will in the future approach it far less honestly.

Let us make no mistake. We cannot hope to win a new generation by pandering to its prejudices and immaturities. Are we really prepared to maintain that St. Paul would have captured the world for Christ more surely and thoroughly if he had interpreted the Gospel in such a way as not to make it a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks? And if not, why do we imagine that we shall be more successful with a policy of accommodation than he would have been? After all, however sorely our creeds need re-interpreting and our theology reshaping, our first mission is to change not theologies but men. A thoroughly shallow, selfish, carnal man can accept an enlightened theology; but no man in whom a great change has not taken place can accept a Gospel that bids him forsake all he has and take up his cross. For one man who rejects Christianity because he misunderstands it, ten reject it because they understand it too well—because they know it is a call to the selfless and sacrificial life. Our first concern is with the Gospel; and our theology will be adventurous precisely in proportion as it is the outcome of our passion for a Gospel which is neither calmly academical, nor sturdily "average," but a dynamic, subversive, mys-

terious, overwhelming force that seeks the salvation of the cultured eclectic and the plain average man alike by bringing a sword before it brings peace, laying the soul's citadel waste before building it again, and making life to come by the gateway of death.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CALL FOR ADVENTUROUS DISCIPLESHIP

We are accustomed to say that uncertainty is the essence of true adventure, and that the Christian adventure is no exception to this rule. But while it is true that the man who has committed himself wholly to God has committed himself to more than he knows, the uncertainty belongs to the way, and not to the end, of his pilgrimage. It is no part of the God-intended discipline of Christian knights-errant to lack a true vision of Him who is their goal. That vision may be brief as a lightning flash; the soul may pay for one brilliant moment of seeing by long years of obscure night. Yet it is not the darkness of the way, but the brightness of the vision, that makes the Christian adventurer. What the soul has once truly seen it can never unsee, and our fleeting moments of spiritual lucidity give us the light whereby we walk all the days of our life. It is the characteristic vice of a sentimental religious romanticism to invest the hardness and hazard of the pilgrim's way with an entirely false significance, and thus to throw the whole conception of pilgrimage out of focus. To lose one's bearings or to sustain

wounds in the Christian pilgrimage has no more value, taken by itself, than the strayings and tumbles of a spirited boy out on a holiday ramble; and so long as the would-be adventurer of the Spirit remains preoccupied with the twists and turns of the road, the real adventure has not so much as begun. He who is the Captain of our salvation, and therefore Himself the Great Adventurer, had very little to say concerning the piquant possibilities and thrilling risks of the way. Drawn by what He saw before Him in remorseless lucidity of vision, He set His face to go to Jerusalem; speaking now and then of the Cross that awaited Him, but hardly at all of the inconveniences and hardships of the road that led thither, and providing no foundation whatever for the romantic embroidery with which a certain school of religious *littérateurs* has tricked out the way of the Cross. He chose as His disciples men who bore not the faintest resemblance to the flushed, exalted figures which these writers depict for us. Blunt, straight men they were; immune, indeed, from the theological and ecclesiastical conventions of Scribes and Pharisees, and from the bitter nationalism of the Judæans, yet possessing all the prejudices and conventions of their own class, and burdened with the heavy, lumbering minds of men put early to hard and monotonous toil. They followed Him blunderingly and blindly, making every kind of mistake except the mistake of

romanticism, hanging back at every unexpected turning, and impelled to go on only by their deep-rooted devotion to their Leader. And when Christ had risen, and the greatest of Apostles was born "out of due time," it was not a rapt visionary, a mystic poet, a graceful knight-errant who won for Christianity a world-wide empire, but one Saul, a Pharisee, cradled in the most cramping system of traditions and conventions, a typical citizen of his world, combining the forensic temper of the Roman with the argumentative genius of the Greek and still remaining a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

Our first step, then, must be to recognise that the essential thing about the Christian adventure is not the element of uncertainty (though uncertainty always plays a large and important disciplinary rôle in it), but *the adventurer's personal vision of God*—a vision fleeting, may be, and all too rare; partial, certainly, and needing much constant correction and enlargement; but always authentic, dynamic, indelible. And having cleared our minds of the sentimental and romantic catch-phrases that go to obscure the central reality of the Great Adventure, we may profitably interrogate ourselves concerning our reluctance to embark upon it. True, the merely romantic interpretation of Christianity stirs a hidden chord in many, and not least often in the most unlikely quarters. It is the timid, middle-aged soul, fettered by dreary routine

and weakened by disillusionment, that is often most easily stirred by the note of romantic adventure. The unquenchable longing to escape from a machine-driven existence asserts itself, and though the enchained soul knows itself impotent to follow the call to freedom, that bitter conviction only goes to intensify the allurement of that call. But when the trappings and romanticisms are discarded, and the Great Adventure presented in its original form, the response is wanting. It seems too much like an invitation to exchange a life of dreary security and comfort for a life of equally dreary risk and discomfort. So long as the religious romanticist has the word, the adventure presents itself as an attractive pursuit, with just that spice of danger that is man's eternal lure. But seen in the dry light of truth, what appeared as an agreeably stimulating element of risk resolves itself into a depressing certainty of wounds, shame and loss. And while we have learnt to disregard pain and the loss of life itself on the field of earthly battle, we have not yet learnt " to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and to look for no reward " in the Christian conflict. In the realm of spirit we remain enslaved by our craze for automatic safety devices, and our present-day instinct for corporateness adds one more such safety device to our already formidable outfit.

# Christianity in the New Age

## I

That the new cult of the corporate Christian life represents a valid demand, need not be emphasised; but when, as is so frequently the case, it is coupled with a call to adventure, it is time to stop and think. There is such a thing, certainly, as a corporate adventure; if the soul must be adventurous, so must the Church. But the corporate experience rests upon the individual experience, and to bracket the two as equally important and primary is sheer confusion. The first belongs to the *esse* of the Christian life; the second merely to its *bene esse*. That the soul should make the great adventure is absolutely essential; that it should discover its relation to the whole Body of Christ is most important for a true interpretation of that adventure, and indeed necessary for the working out of its implications; but essential it is not, and wherever the initial adventure has not been made, the corporate sense becomes a source of weakness and self-deception. It is in that case merely the religious form of that instinctive gregariousness which is man's greatest handicap in the search for truth. In first equating the corporate sense with individual vision and then construing the corporate life as a state of club-gregariousness rather than as membership in the family of God, we lose the true idea both of spiritual personality and of spiritual fellowship. The call to a closer realisa-

tion of fellowship is sorely needed, but it is meaningless except as addressed to those who are already adventurers of faith.

We may seek to brush this aside as a return to individualism, but we do not get rid of an inconvenient fact by labelling it with a discredited term. If the Church is founded upon the fact of Redemption and of man's response to it, it is founded upon the individual personality. Here lies the fundamental difference between the Church and an army. The individual soldier is a unit in the army ; but the individual Christian, while of course being a unit in the Church, is something far more than a unit. Wherever a soul has entered into true fellowship with the Father of spirits, thinking the thoughts of God, identifying itself with His purposes, surrendering itself to His guidance, there is potentially the Church. " One person worships God, and no increase of numbers, no consecrated building or large assembly can add anything. . . . A humble heart lifted anywhere in the name of Christ meets with God, and enjoys the fellowship from which all other fellowship should proceed." * This can only be deprecated as individualism if we choose to define the individual in eighteenth-century fashion as a self-contained and isolated unit. But surely it is high time for that phantom to go the way of all mythical lumber. When we speak of the individual, we

* J. Oman, "Vision and Authority," p. 132.

mean the individual in his place amid his fellows. And if we persist in imagining that corporate life is destructive of individuality, or rather that it demands the voluntary sacrifice of a man's individual life for the good of the community, it is because we tend to assign a purely biological significance to the unity of mankind, whereas its true significance is spiritual. It is a unity of individuals who are meant to know and understand each other, and to live in spiritual intercommunication. In such a community the individual is not a means but an end; it is only as each member is a complete and virile personality that he is able to influence his fellow-members and be influenced by them. Where individual development is sacrificed, there can be no question of influence, but only of hypnotism and obsession. In such a society the strongest personalities appear to dominate the rest, but in reality both strong and weak are dominated by the crowd-spirit, the community degenerating into the herd.

It is here that the application of war metaphors to the conception of the Church has worked much havoc. Such metaphors have of course a limited validity. It is obviously true that the Church should be a warrior Church, that her members should give their best to a common cause without a thought to safety or an eye to reward, and that she cannot afford to sit at ease so long as the forces of evil are arrayed against all that makes

life noble, pure and lovely. But when we press the metaphor beyond these limits, pour contempt upon the inward and individual significance of Christianity, sneer at " those who are only concerned with saving their own miserable little souls," and lay it down that the Christian soldier is only a unit in a great army, whose business it is not to worry about his apprehension of things unseen, but simply to take his orders and " do his bit," we are introducing a confusion which, in the name of a more virile Christianity, will swamp what little Christianity we have. The true soldier's courage is a most noble and wonderful thing, but behind it lies a wave of patriotism that bears the whole nation upon its crest. When the soldier goes to battle he goes as one of a company, or as the leader of a company. As he contributes the treasure of his courage to the common stock, it flows back to him enriched by the courage of every brave man who fights beside him. But the Christian adventure is, *in its initial and determining stage*, a lonely business; and the Christian fellowship we call the Church helps a man, and is helped by him, precisely to the extent to which his deepest experience has been " a flight of the alone to the Alone."

The whole spiritual history of mankind is a commentary upon this axiom. The world's great spiritual leaders, healers and comforters have ever been those who derived their inspiration, not from the psychological stimulus of crowds,

but from the mountain-solitudes of communion with the Eternal. Such were the best representatives of mediæval sainthood. There is little about these gaunt and *outré* ascetics to commend them to our practical religious sense; yet, even while we dispose of them with such ready-made phrases as "morbid asceticism," "exaggerated emotions," "distorted outlook," and so forth, we are haunted by the suspicion that they succeeded where we fail, that their lives had a force, a "prick," a sheer palpable efficiency which ours lack. We strive, and strive vainly, to impress the world; they impressed it without any striving—their one aim, indeed, was to be ignored by it. We shrink from the great, lonely experiences of the soul, fearing to lose our influence over our fellows; yet there never was a time when our influence as Christians was weaker. They rushed into the spiritual desert, urged by an unappeasable hunger for the dread solitudes of God, and, like George Fox, they instinctively "spoke to all conditions" and had a magic key to the hearts of their fellows. Humble St. Benedict, starting "a school in which man may serve God," achieved the education of Europe. Meditative St. Bernard, delighting in lonely rapture, pent back for years, with the granite dyke of his wonderful eloquence, the great intellectual revolution which broke him in the end. St. Catherine of Siena, well-nigh intoxicated with love of silence, faced Popes and Cardinals,

holding the honour of the Church in her emaciated hands, and quelling forces that made the strongest men of the period shrink back. St. Teresa, glowing visionary, effected a practical reformation which men of action had deemed impossible. These and many more of their type were men and women who cultivated a relation to God awful in its singleness. They saw Jesus with their own eyes, heard the word meant for their ears only, and dared to follow out the audacious logic, the tremendous dialectic, of such individual experience. They had seen Jesus at first hand, and once a soul has seen Jesus, life becomes a divinely simple and effective thing—an arrow flying straight to its mark.

We might illustrate the same great principle from the history of the Anabaptists and the great spiritual reformers of that period. The Anabaptist communities, whatever their defects and extravagances, represented the fellowship of those who had come to know God at first hand, and to feel His regenerating touch. It is easy for advocates of the so-called Catholic Revival to be witty at the expense of those who made a deep, personal experience the foundation-stone of the Christian life and to speak of "prig factories." These early re-discoverers of the personal, experimental way to God were obviously one-sided in their presentation of Christianity, and exhibited the unlovely consequences of their one-sidedness; but the side they emphasised

was the vital side. It is ours to-day to add the social and corporate aspect to their unfinished vision; to substitute it for that vision is sheer disaster. They dug out for us once more the only true foundation upon which a more Catholic conception can be built; in spurning that foundation we are dooming the superstructure.

## II

Moreover, in disposing of that foundation in the cheap and flippant fashion current in not a few quarters, we are taking it for granted that we are only dealing with a handful of misguided sectarians. In reality we are dealing with an instinct whose roots are deep in the original documents of the Faith, and with a type of life that reflects the essential atmosphere of New Testament Christianity. It is not so much a question of doctrine and interpretation as of atmosphere, accent, emphasis. Behind these great spiritual individualists lies the Gospel landscape, as it were, and it is with that background that we must come to terms—everything else is mere surface criticism. As we read the story of Jesus in the Gospels "with open face," we are impressed with His sharply individual treatment of those who came into touch with Him. The matchless tale of His miracles is surcharged with this quality. The hand of healing whose touch pierced through the leper's skin to his sore heart;

the endearing name of Daughter to the woman whose innocent shame bade her hide in the crowd and touch His garments unaware ; the preliminary questioning in some cases, the instantaneous response to the faith of others—these are only a few reminders of the wealth of individual appeal which awaits the discovery of the patient student of the Gospels. The conception of individuals as units in a force, cogs in a wheel, means to another's end, is entirely alien to Jesus. So far from seeing men in groups and crowds, He did what we also do instinctively, once we forget our theory of corporateness—He sought to detach each man He met from the crowd, to see him as he was in the deep places of his soul, to understand not merely the needs and desires he shared with his group, but those that were intimately sacred to him alone. Men and women approached Him as units in a crowd, but the moment their eyes met His, they stood forth in all the sharpness of their inalienable individuality. Unmistakable, unforgettable, they stand revealed to us as no amount of mere description could reveal them. We know them through the medium of our Lord's sympathy and understanding as we know our nearest and dearest.

And if we would regain the lost gift of appealing to men, if we would attain to that living unity of fellowship which our barren reaction from a fictitious individualism is powerless to give, we must once more steep ourselves in the

Gospels till we are re-acclimatised to their atmosphere. It is quite true that that atmosphere is something far other than the thin, trying air of Puritan or Anabaptist individualism; yet no one can read the Gospels long or ponder them deeply without feeling that if Jesus was right, then the one thing that matters, as nothing else however important can matter, is that each soul for itself should come into living touch with God and hear His secret, individual word.

So long as we think of the love of God as a vague general philanthropy, or conceive of it as a vapid, mystical infusion of the Divine into the human, we shall be inclined to deprecate any very strong insistence upon the soul's individual relation to God, seeking rather to find its loyalty to God in its loyalty to the community. But the moment we begin to think of that love simply and concretely as it actually came to men in Jesus, the emphasis shifts. For in Jesus love began as a simple loyalty of affection to twelve plain men whom He had chosen to be His companions. He did not come to men with what we would call nowadays a programme of world-evangelisation. He had no plan of campaign, evolved no schemes, did not calculate even in the interests of the Kingdom: He simply loved. And He loved not a vague, dim mass of humanity, but men, women and children among whom His lot was cast, and, in a most intimate and individual sense, the twelve dis-

ciples. He chose these twelve with a disinterestedness which would strike us as the most wonderful thing in the world, were we not blunted to its significance by mindless familiarity with the narrative. He did not sit down and deliberately endeavour to select men who would be the most likely to further the interests of that Kingdom of God which He was sent to bring. We are accustomed to say that these twelve simple working-men founded the Church of Christ; but that is not completely true. It was none of the twelve that created the Church as a world-conquering force; it was Paul, the brilliant pupil of Gamaliel, adding Greek culture to Rabbinic theology; and behind Paul stood such men as Luke, the beloved physician and expert historian; Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures; and, greater than all, the author of the Fourth Gospel, with his profoundly philosophical and speculative endowment. There were men of the Pauline and Lucan type in the world in which Jesus lived; but He did not go out to seek them. Apparently, He did not do much seeking at all. He went wandering by the lake-side and saw Peter and Andrew, James and John, and asked them to bear Him company.

This seems homely and commonplace enough, but it enshrines a whole Divine philosophy. To treat men as ends in themselves, never as means to what might be considered a higher end—that is God's way with us, His fundamental principle

of love. Many of us like to enlarge upon the harshness and corruption of the Church of Rome; but are we quite sure that we know the basal factor in her policy? Is it not simply that Rome has exalted the utilisation of men as means to an external end to a fine art? She is possessed of the evil spirit which looks upon men as so many pawns to be moved hither and thither in the ecclesiastical game. That spirit is not confined to Rome. It was naturalised in Geneva; it is witnessed to by the history of every Church and sect; and it is the fundamental malady of our religious outlook to-day and the bane of our Church life. One need not go very far in any religious community to come upon that unlovely touting for members who are likely to be an asset to the cause—men with money or talents, personality or charm. It seems so natural and harmless to canvass and exploit our fellows in the interests of the Kingdom; indeed, it seems a distinctly religious procedure. But it is essentially unchristian; it is characteristically ultramontane, though it appear in a hyper-Calvinist conventicle. It is the besetting temptation of those who are ambitious for Christ's cause; it is threatening to strangle the life out of the Church to-day, and accounts for much of our spiritual failure. To use men as means is to be disloyal to Him who chose the dull and slow of heart, the ungifted and awkward, for their own sakes, and was loyal to them when they

most retarded His cause and marred His work. He loved His own, and He loved them to the end. Love does not calculate, it does not scheme ; it simply loves and serves.

## III

The time has come for us to face the implications of such a doctrine. If it means anything at all, it means that every man is intended to make personal experience of the love of God, to enter into a communion with his Maker in which no other can intermeddle, that his chief end—to use the memorable old words—is " to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." It means that it is our first business to seek this experience for ourselves, and our second business to witness to others concerning it. This does not imply a self-centred and isolated religion. The individual, as we well know, is not a self-contained unit. He is set in a community, and it is in and through that community that he will fully realise his personal destiny ; but he can only be of real help to the community so long as he does not put it into the place of that personal relation to a Divine Person which is his true life. His work for the community, so far from being the end to which he is to be subordinated, is a means for his perfecting, and through his perfecting for the perfecting of his fellow-members. This is unwelcome doctrine in an age in which the

commonwealth of men has taken the place of the Kingdom of God, and a sentimental confusion has identified a man's personal with his selfish interests; but it is the only doctrine that will avail to make the Church once more holy and Catholic, at once an ark of refuge and a fighting force. Protest as we will, the supreme need in the Church to-day is not for men willing to "do their bit," but for men whose contribution to the Christian fellowship will be their *selves*—their redeemed and consecrated personalities. To oppose such an ideal to corporate welfare is only possible when, as we have said already, the community is conceived of in biological and spatial terms. Once the essentially spiritual nature of the corporate life is recognised, it becomes clear that the man who sees God face to face on the lonely mount of vision is thereby nearer to his fellows and more closely identified with the common life of the community than the most heroic toiler in the plains without such moments of vision. It is when, shutting the door, he prays to his Father who seeth in secret that his finger is on the pulse of humanity and he knows himself one with his brethren.

The New Testament Church is the classic illustration of this principle. There never was a Christian community which exemplified the common life and the corporate consciousness so triumphantly. Its members called nothing their own, and ate bread in common with gladness.

They felt the sap of the one Vine pulsing through each and all of its branches ; they saw each other in Christ, and, living unto Him, lived for each other and for the community with an instinctive and complete loyalty. And when the first flush of new life had ebbed and dissensions marred the unity of the redeemed, Paul and the Pauline circle perpetuated the Apostolic spirit. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" * Yet this same Paul, whose sense of spiritual solidarity was so vivid as to be a constant pain to him, was the preacher of a Gospel of individual redemption. Penitence, faith, reconciliation, the inward witness, mystic union—all these realities, however interpreted, can only be experienced by the individual, and not by the group as such. The Church of Paul was an organic unity. When it met for worship, each member had something to contribute to the common stock. "When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." † But behind this pooling of spiritual riches lay the dread solitude of those who are apprehended of Christ in the deep, lonely places of the soul. Our meetings for prayer and worship lack the unifying note. We come encased each in his particular religious mood and theological bent. If one member tries to make his contribution to the common stock,

* 2 Cor. xi. 29. † 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

others are sure to find it uncongenial and even jarring. As a matter of fact, in spite of our reiterated emphasis upon corporateness, we retain the most unlovely aspects of individualism. We have allowed cheap criticism to filch our treasure from us. We have fallen a prey to a superficial theory of the community, which calls itself Catholic, but is in reality pagan and, in fundamental essence, materialistic. Common sense ought to have taught us long ere this that to decry the individual is to belittle the community, and that to minimise the importance of personal sanctity is to kill the Christian society at its very root. There is an altar in men—a deep and majestic place—where the soul transacts with its God, and life is cleansed and kindled with unearthly flame. To-day we tend to live in the laboratory and the kitchen; our concern is to "keep the home fires burning." But it is the altar that makes the man; and if the altar fire is allowed to go out, what was once a meeting-place of earth and heaven, pulsing with angelic life, becomes a pathetic survival.

There is much work to do for and in the Church, and to eyes newly opened to the world's need the one important thing seems to be to enrol workers and still more workers. But if the altar makes the temple, then its services must be brought to the testing of the altar fire. Morbid spiritual self-culture is obviously fatal, and working for others is in many cases a more

potent means of grace than a thousand sacraments. But having granted that, we must still suspect the external activity—however useful and beneficent—which renders the soul distracted and unconcentrated, unfitting it for its supreme business. We are not concerned here with the humble and irksome duties of life, which may be as straight a road to God as prayer, but with self-imposed tasks often born of the fatal lust to be busy at all costs. St. Ambrose retails the quaint old belief that when eaglets have arrived at a certain age, the parent bird takes them to the edge of the rock and holds their heads up to the sun. If they can endure its blaze without blinking, it knows them for true scions of the eagle race; if they wince and close their eyes, it drops them over the edge of the abyss. Which things are a parable. The adventurous soul is the soul that has the courage to relinquish every task, however good in itself, which unfits it for that sustained gaze into the face of God that is its very life.

This takes courage. There is something attractive to the noble soul about a religion that is chivalrous and full of humanitarian passion, expressing itself in social crusades and social service. Compared to it, a religion which puts the individual's inward relation to God and communion with Him in the forefront seems at first sight valetudinarian and selfish. Yet a deeper view shows it to involve the utmost courage

and self-abnegation. The moment we strip such terms as penitence, conversion, prayer, mystic union of their conventional trappings, we are in an august and lonely region where only the brave can venture. With all our vaunted joy in risk and our gospel of the adventurous life, we are afraid of the inner world as our fathers were not. And even if we were as courageous as they, it still remains that to draw near to God in spirit and in truth is a thing to make the bravest falter. It belongs, not to the inherent tenderness of the Gospel, but to our vulgarisation of that tenderness, that we can speak of man's communion with God as a religious and psychological commonplace, and run lightly up that Hill of God which the saints trod in holy fear. Dora Greenwell, in speaking of "the parsimony of grace," treats of the mystery and augustness of that communion from an angle we neglect to our loss :—

How few from age to age are called into close neighbourhood and nearness with God; how few even among these chosen to remain with Him in unbroken spiritual communion! . . . Only from time to time does a heart touched by His highest influence awake to wonder, to adore, to see Him as He is. Yet the river of God is full of water, with Him is the residue of the Spirit. Spiritual creation must be as easy to God as is natural, yet man seems kept at a great distance from God purposely, and no doubt in mercy. . . . "What has close friendship with God ever proved to man but a costly, self-sacrificing service?" The eminent favour

of God, as shown in large spiritual graces, seems to expose the recipient to such grievous outward persecutions, to such insidious attacks, such protracted secret trials, that I have long learnt to acquiesce in the hiding of God's power, and to look upon it, as I have said, as one of the deep secrets of His mercy.*

How little we know of this shrinking from intimate commerce with God! Yet no man ever truly saw God who did not shrink from that which such a vision involves. We take the caricature of personal religion, the man who delights in pious exercises but often lives as if he were ignorant of the very elements of justice and mercy, and then speak of the selfishness of looking after one's own soul and leaving the world to perish. Such cheap taunts may do very well for the street-corner orator; that they should have crept into our books on religious reconstruction is deplorable, and one finds it hard to believe that men who have themselves approached the inner sanctuary can descend to them. The cry of the hour is that the Church must vindicate her right to exist by making a genuine contribution to the world's life. True; but her supreme contribution to the world's life is the man whose feet stand within the gates of the spiritual temple, whose life is hid with Christ in God. Such men are like the ten righteous that might have saved Sodom—their influence is incalculable. Nor are they only to be found among the scanty ranks

* "Colloquia Crucis," pp. 122-123.

of born mystics, as we tend to imagine. History shows how men of average gifts and practical turn, men of dull imagination and unremarkable personality, have heard the call of God, and leaving the comfortable ruts of conventional living have risen to dynamic sanctity. There is no company so representative of every imaginable type of humanity as the glorious company of saints. There is no congregation so commonplace that the fire of God cannot kindle it to splendour, no soul so dark that the call of God cannot make it illustrious. The world demands many things from a feeble, halting Church, and not a few of its demands are entirely valid ; but its deepest, though often inarticulate, cry is for men who have seen God upon the mount and bring the light of the Sanctuary down to earth. In our hurry to respond to the social challenge, we have all but forgotten the supreme debt we owe to our fellow-men, the fundamental charity out of which all charities spring. We are not brave enough to leave the market-place and enter the secret chamber that we may sanctify ourselves for the world's sake. We need the poet's astringent message transmuted into the highest spiritual terms :—

> For this is Love's nobility—
> Not to scatter bread and gold,
> Goods and raiment bought and sold ;
> But to hold fast his simple sense,
> And speak the speech of innocence,

And with hand, and body, and blood,
To make his bosom-counsel good.
He that feeds men serveth few;
He serveth all that dares be true.

## IV

"After a few months' experience of conditions out here," wrote an officer at the Front, "I think a good many people have come to the conclusion that there is only one thing worth living for, only one thing worth thinking about—and that is God." * If this testimony is representative of a widespread movement — and there is every ground for believing that it is— why do not men who are thus exercised about the great issues of life betake themselves in larger numbers to the Church and its teachers? Mr. C. H. S. Matthews finds the reason for this reluctance in the lack of frankness and inwardness which characterises the bulk of our preaching :—

Men want something more than a tradition that has become for them the empty form in which men of other ages have tried to explain their apprehension, under other conditions of life and knowledge, of the living God. They would rather have an honest attempt, however inadequate, to express a genuine experience of our own day than the most eloquent exposition of the established orthodoxy by a man who shows no signs

* Quoted in "Faith and Freedom," p. 5.

of having himself wrestled with God for the truth he has to proclaim. That is the real reason why a book like Mr. Wells's "God the Invisible King" has a sale, and arouses an interest among the laity which no book by any officer of the Church could hope to rival. It is a book peculiarly easy to criticise. Its philosophy and its theology are astonishingly inadequate, but it is obviously the sincere utterance of a man who speaks out of a real and vivid experience of the living God, and therefore it commands attention in a world where men, however blindly, are seeking the living God.*

One is not quite sure if it is correct to say that it is the vital experience behind Mr. Wells's book which made it so amazingly popular. It is at least open to question whether the book would have been quite so eagerly bought, had its author not been a popular novelist whose religious convictions had undergone a complete metamorphosis. Yet the main issue remains the same: it is the preacher or writer who can speak out of a vital experience of God that finds a response. And it is this vital element that is largely lacking in present-day preaching. The average sermon does not spring straight from life, or make a direct appeal to that mysterious, deep life that slumbers in man. Comparatively few preachers, indeed, speak out of a spiritual experience so dynamic that it creates its own message, as it were, and speak in the sure conviction that deep in the hearer's soul lies the hidden

* "Faith and Freedom," pp. 6, 7.

seed, the inward witness, that can respond to the message. There is a good deal of thoughtful and impressive preaching, a good deal of able reconstruction of the historical background of texts, of practical application, persuasive appeal and suggestive reflection; but one seldom feels that the preacher is speaking of that which he has seen and known and his hands have handled, and that his words are words of life, words kindling life, words that have hands to grip and feet to pursue. The preacher's sense of the fact that the stolid, conventional assembly sitting before him was created for the express purpose of drinking deep of the very life of God, that in each soul there is something waiting to be born, something so potent that it needs but a touch to set it free, seems to be weak and fitful. And what is true of preaching is equally true of the minister's private intercourse on things spiritual. He may be a good fireside apologist, a stimulating counsellor, and sympathetic comforter; but one misses the direct impact of life upon life. And it is largely for want of this vital quality that ministers have become dissatisfied and disillusioned, and tend to blame the defects of their ecclesiastical system, or the conditions under which they have to work, for that which nothing so external can remedy.

Thus a chaplain with the Mesopotamian Force, writing on "The 'Failure' of the Church," finds one cause in the fact that the average man

trained in a Protestant atmosphere is ignorant of the true priestly function of the clergy:—

> I often wonder how many priests of the Church of England have found any great demand for their sacerdotal services to wounded and dying in the heat of a battle. For my part, I regret to say that (except in a few cases) I have been able to do little more than the work of a stretcher-bearer; simply because men did not understand one's priestly function and powers. In all cases they appreciate the "padre" as a preacher-man, a sport, and a friend. Otherwise his position conveys nothing to them. And this is because they do not know. And here they miss the comfort and discipline of religion.*

This is a typical utterance, and it is profoundly symptomatic. We are not concerned here with the question of the validity or otherwise of sacerdotal claims. The point is that if a priest cannot represent the deeper aspects of man's life in Christ as a mere "padre"—"a preacher-man, a sport and a friend"—he will do well to consider whether he has not missed his calling as a priest. Whatever be the importance of Sacraments, if the ordinary layman who really knows his Lord cannot, during an informal talk with a wounded or dying man, speak the word of witness which, halting and defective though it be, will vindicate itself as coming from the deep and calling to the deep, Christianity is hardly worth troubling about. That a man

* *The Church Times*, August 30, 1918.

should exercise the office of a priest without having first made proof of the Divine efficacy of the word spoken by the wayside, and realising that he who witnesses to what he has himself experienced has in very deed the Word of God in his mouth, is amazing. One cannot conceive what intelligent sacramental teaching such a priest could give.

The truth of the matter is that until we have recovered that deep, experimental knowledge of God, lacking which neither preacher nor priest has any right to his office, it is futile to argue about Sacraments, or, indeed, about anything else. Once the preacher speaks out of his intimate experience, and speaks not to the crowd but to the soul, with an individual, dynamic, spiritual accent, there will be no occasion to talk of the failure of the Church. For the failure of the Church is bound up with the failure of individual discipleship, and where there is no life, the Sacraments are a delusion.

# CHAPTER IX

## THE CALL FOR AN ADVENTUROUS CHURCH

### I

In emphasising the call for an adventurous Church, we are at one with many outside her borders who have declared that they would gladly cast in their lot with a Church ready to do and dare to the uttermost, but cannot see why men of virile fibre and high ideals should be expected to attach themselves to an institution whose sole concern seems to be to keep itself alive—a task which indeed absorbs what energy it still possesses. "We have learnt," they say, "that there are things more precious than life, that to live for oneself and one's own safety and well-being isn't a man's life at all. And we naturally expect the Church to lead the way in unselfishness and courage. We expect her to live not for her own comfort but for the world around her, to lead in every righteous crusade, to inspire social reform, and to be the spokesman of the neglected and oppressed. But wherever we look the Church's main concern seems to be with her rolls of membership and her balance-sheets. So long as the financial

year closes with a credit balance and the membership is fairly well maintained, the average congregation congratulates itself upon its prosperity. The fact that it is surrounded by a population living in social and spiritual darkness, and that it has done little, if anything, to uplift, comfort and enlighten those outside its doors, and to help them to regard the Church as their natural refuge and home, does not seem to trouble it. Its horizon is bounded by such questions as pew-rents, collections, ecclesiastical schemes, church socials, and the thousand and one other matters which pertain to the conventional life of a modern congregation."

Such criticism is, of course, less than just in as far as it takes the form of a sweeping generalisation; yet no one can pretend that it does not embody a truth which might well fill the Church with searchings of heart. It cannot be denied that her besetting sins are timidity and selfishness. Her fear of opposing vested interests and powerful institutions, of alienating those who have in the past been among her most liberal financial supporters, and of offending pious folk whose conception of their Christian duty does not seem to include human sympathy and social justice, is a dark blot on her escutcheon. Her confirmed tendency to degenerate into a religious club for a coterie of mediocre, respectable folk whose one ambition is to be comfortable in the spiritual life as in everything else, to mix only

with people of their own social standing, and to see their organisations financially prosperous, repels high-minded men who would otherwise seek light and leading at her hands. Whatever the Church is, she is not adventurous; and the best instinct in man demands that those who name the name of Christ take the high places of the field and launch forth boldly into the deep. Nor has the searching fire of war done more up to the present than reveal the Church's weakness. It has not kindled a fire in her midst. It has not inspired her to break through the conventional conception which makes her first task to consist in getting people to "come to church." In one of the National Mission leaflets, the writer, after referring in moving terms to the heroism and self-sacrifice of our soldiers, reaches this conclusion: "Let us therefore lay aside all scruples begotten of timidity, and with great boldness make a personal resolution to live as Catholic Christians in the best sense of that word, and from this day forward let us say our night and morning prayers, and say grace before and after our meals wherever eaten."* That such a leaflet should have been published and circulated is surely a lamentable sign, and no one can wonder that men and women who have faced reality, to however limited an extent, turn away with contempt from a type of Churchmanship which,

* Quoted by Miss A. Maude Royden, "The Hour and the Church," p. 73.

in face of the heroism of the trenches, exhorts good Christians to have the great boldness " to say grace before and after meals wherever eaten " !

But if the Church's critics, in laying a merciless finger upon her lack of adventurousness, have done her a service, it is otherwise when they proceed to define what precisely they mean by an adventurous Church. For most of them the adventurous Church is the popular Church, *i.e.*, a Church which, while by no means in favour with the moneyed classes or the prosperous *bourgeoisie*, is understood and appreciated by the masses of the people, who find in her the redresser of their injuries, the champion of their rights, and the provider of the kind of teaching and sentiment, work and play, fellowship and mutual support, which they crave for. They ask how it is that Church work and organisation lack that warm life, absolute unanimity of aim, cheerful good fellowship in which all personal differences and predilections are forgotten in the joy of working together for a common cause. They wonder why the consciousness of a common foe to fight and a common end to attain does not impel the Churches to unite and present one unbroken front.

But in defining the adventurous Church as a Church of the masses, and demanding her corporate union with a view to her increased popularity and effectiveness, we are in reality denying her adventurousness. For a depleted

and dismembered Church to cut herself adrift from a middle-class constituency, whose attachment is palpably weakening, and make a bold appeal to the masses, takes a certain degree of resolution and hardihood, and may involve some unpleasantness and controversy ; but it is scarcely an adventure : it is essentially a counsel of common sense. The same might be said of corporate union. Motives of prudence and the instinct of self-preservation are all that is required to effect such a union, and the time is fast approaching when it will take far more courage and adventurousness—for the Free Churches, at any rate—to keep separate than to unite. This does not imply, of course, that a Church which attracts the democracy and is bent upon corporate union is necessarily actuated by prudential and utilitarian motives. On the contrary, one sees the time coming when the Church will be truly one, and truly a Church of the people, as a consequence of its fearless obedience to the Spirit's leading. In the present instance, however, we are dealing with a certain popular conception of what the Church's policy should be, and in that particular conception her popular appeal and her endeavours towards corporate union are frankly based upon utilitarian considerations. Seeing that it is not the external action but the spirit which counts, such a conception, whatever truth of a lower order it may embody, is *not* the conception of an adventurous Church. The adventurous Church

may attract the masses for a season, even as her Master was heard gladly of the common people for a season ; but if she be indeed a Church of Christ, she will be no more permanently popular than He was. She will consent to be neither an almoner nor an arbitrator. Again and again she will have to refuse the request of him who would bid her command his brother to share his inheritance with him, and will speak of the forgiveness of sins to him who asks freedom from physical disability or release from hampering conditions. She will indeed labour to secure for men the best possible environment ; but she will refuse to agree with the social enthusiast that the slum and the village hovel are the only existing types of bad environment, insisting that the sleek comfort and superficial religiosity of the middle-class church-going family, and the humanistic culture and refined self-centredness of certain academic circles, provide an environment fully as vicious, and far more difficult to counteract or redeem, as the open scandal of mean streets and brutalised agricultural districts. She will be bold to declare that her mission is to the rich as well as to the poor, to the respectable as much as to the outcast, and that the needs of the first are possibly even more urgent than the needs of the second. She will maintain, in the face of opposition and contempt, that if it is her high privilege to feel for the struggling ranks of Labour and bring a warm

and active sympathy to its just aspirations, it is no less her duty to sympathise with the difficulties of the capitalist, and to help him also in his equally hard struggle to keep his soul alive. If she is under stern obligation to denounce the vices of the rich and to condemn the exploiter of his fellows, she is no less solemnly bound to convict King Demos of his sins.

Such a Church cannot hope to be popular. Like her Lord, she will be set for the fall and rising again of many, and for a sign which shall be spoken against. Nor will her attitude towards the question of corporate union commend her to the great mass of men. Against all popular demands, she will deprecate a union based upon compromise, indifference, or utilitarian considerations. She will judge that he who holds his distinctive convictions in Christ's name, that is, in the spirit of Christ, is a truer friend of unity than the man who clamours for a compromise in order that the Church may be more outwardly impressive and efficient. She will declare that confidence in the power of an outward union is nothing else than confidence in the flesh; that it is, in essence, materialistic and not spiritual. She will remind men that our Lord found a united ecclesiastical organisation and flung fire and a severing sword into its midst, and that in all ages it has not been the Church's true prophets and leaders who have laboured to conserve her outward unbrokenness or gloried in her imposing

size. She will contend that a corporate union of sects, so far from being necessary to that true unity of insight, love and witness which is Christ's purpose for His Church, may, under certain circumstances, be the worst enemy of that unity, leaving the world impressed, perhaps, but as worldly as before.

## II

The fact is that outside critics of the Church, while often worth listening to, cannot speak the final word, for the simple reason that they do not and cannot know what the Church is in her essential nature and Divine calling. They recognise that she is not what she ought to be. They have their own vision of the ideal Church, and it is well for us to pay heed to that vision. Yet, in the last resort, they have no positive contribution to make to our problem. They recognise the Church's disease, and their diagnosis is penetrative, and, in the main, correct. It is when they attempt to prescribe that they go astray; for their fundamental conception of the Church is at fault, and their suggested reforms proceed upon a basis which, however valid in its place, is not the rock upon which Christ built His Church. And the reason why so many inside the Church are ready, not merely to accept their strictures—which we ought to do in all humility—but to put their suggested reforms

into execution, is that the majority of Church members have lost sight of the New Testament doctrine of the Church. They have forgotten what the Church is in her essential nature, and what she stands for. This is scarcely their fault; it is one more result of the decay of the Church's teaching ministry and of the vulgarisation of her life.

The average man tends to regard the ideal Church as a religious club—not, indeed, in any exclusive or "West-Endy" sense, but very much after the pattern of the war-time Y.M.C.A. Now, speaking theoretically, there is no reason whatever why a Church conceived as a club should not prove a very helpful institution; why, for example, it should not radiate that atmosphere of brotherly love and comradely co-operation which is so much needed in this cold world of ours. But as a matter of hard fact, wherever any particular congregation models itself upon the club principle, it at best proves but a very second-rate edition of the secular club or association. There are not the same energy and good management, the same friendliness and loyalty, that mark the best clubs; and in the end such congregations generally fall upon evil days, for the simple reason that the people who are attracted to them by an innate club instinct discover that it is so much easier to run a club, and so much pleasanter to belong to one, when no attempt is made to

mingle spiritual teaching with social activity and enjoyment. Men cannot long remain loyal to such a congregation, and their disloyalty is a witness to the haunting power of a truer ideal. It is quite beside the mark to compare, as is constantly done, the contrarieties and dissensions which mark the life of the Church with the unanimity and hearty good fellowship of other associations working for a common cause, such as the Woman Suffrage movement. These associations work for ends which cover only a relatively small part of life, are easily defined, and admit of little misunderstanding. Their members join them, not because they wish to learn how to be loyal to those ends, but because they are already convinced that those ends are for their own good and for the good of the race, and their one desire is to work for their realisation. Obviously, given such unanimity of aim, these societies will run smoothly and be characterised by a high degree of good fellowship and self-denial, for they operate only along certain definite and circumscribed lines upon which all their members are already agreed. What differences emerge are differences of detail and method, and any disagreement that arises is born, not of outraged convictions, but of a sense of personal injury. This means that, provided its members are enthusiastically convinced of the main issue and, like sensible folk, agree to suppress purely personal considerations in the interests of a

common cause, such a society is bound to run harmoniously and effectively.

But when we turn to the Church we are dealing with a society entirely different in kind. The Church is not an association of people holding the same views on certain subjects and largely alike in temperament and tastes. The Church is the society of those who profess to have entered upon a new type of life, and are being acclimatised by degrees to a new atmosphere—a process not always agreeable to behòld. The Christian society is all-inclusive. Indeed, for wealth of human contrasts, there is nothing more striking than an average congregation. It includes adults and children, the simple and the learned, the vigorous and the feeble, people of every variety of training, taste, talents and outlook. They are not convinced supporters of a clear-cut system, or associated to carry out a stereotyped programme. Their conception and interpretation of Christianity are largely in flux and as varied as their minds and temperaments, and the bond of their union cannot be summed up in constitutions and by-laws. Strangely mingled and blown together from all quarters of the moral and spiritual globe, they are united, at the lowest, by their conscious need of God; at the highest, by their common love of Jesus. When the critic tells us that that love ought to make them united in spirit and overflowing with good will towards all men, we of course agree, and there is no con-

gregation that has not in its midst those who have so learned Christ. But the Church is not a ready-made institution. It is a body in the making, a society of those who are learning, awkwardly and blunderingly, to walk in newness of life, who are growing slowly into apprehension of a truth whose fullness is beyond their highest attainment, and who are being initiated into a love that redeems by blood. Add to these learners—many of them woefully backward and dull—the merely nominal members who inevitably attach themselves to such a society and become its reproach and scandal, and it follows that the Christian Church cannot be compared to any other association — that, indeed, its assimilation to the club type would be its final condemnation. For the Church represents a kingdom extending over the whole of life, and a truth which needs every type of mind to contribute to its right understanding. It is, therefore, precisely as her members gain strong individual convictions as to the application of Christianity to given departments of life, and intimate individual insight into some aspect of the truth, *i.e.*, as they enter the region where disagreement and contention are almost inevitable, that they grow into true membership of Christ's Body.

It is hard to make the mind of to-day realise that outward unity and concerted action—the things it admires so much in an army—are not

essential marks of the Church of Christ; that, indeed, they may be signs of decay and death. It is at this point that most present-day Church Union movements are based upon unsound principles. They assume that Churches have the right, and even the duty, to compromise upon matters of doctrine and spiritual conviction; with a view to what is termed "the more effective mobilisation of Christian forces." But the unity which Christ pleaded for does not come by any kind of compromise. If the underlying sense of oneness in Christ Jesus, the spiritual union of a common redemption and a common calling, cannot make itself manifest in presence of widely differing convictions on faith and order, each denominational body respecting the convictions of the other but remaining unflinchingly loyal to its own vision, no scheme of corporate union will bring true unity one whit nearer. The Free Churches in England have before them a scheme for federation as distinct from corporate union, one of the main practical considerations being the prevention of that overlapping which has long been a scandal in town and country alike. It is by no means the first attempt to cope with the problem, but all such endeavours have been more or less ignored by the parties concerned. One of the aims of the new federation scheme is to provide machinery which cannot be ignored, *i.e.*, a Council consisting of authorised representatives of the denominations concerned. This

means that what practically amounts to compulsion is to be employed to secure what sheer Christian decency, to mention no higher motive, ought to have secured long ago without any outside intervention.

There is always a tendency on the part of ecclesiastics to emphasise what must be called the prudential aspect of Church Union, or of Federation, urging upon Churches animated by no spontaneous prompting that union spells greater influence in public questions, a more popular appeal, and the effective mobilisation of spiritual forces. But a genuine union movement can only spring from a vital impulse within the membership of the Churches; and such an impulse does not come into being at the suggestion of a committee. It can be preached as a spiritual crusade; it cannot be engineered into existence. Least of all can it be evoked by an exposition of the advantages of union. It is not the promise of heightened prestige that will weld the Church into one: it is the call to sacrifice and to suffer. A union entered upon under ecclesiastical pressure and from motives of utility is destined to break down. The utmost it can do is to impress a certain section of the public, and one cannot think it will be a very large section. The "man in the street" is far too shrewd not to see the real motive, and will frame his estimate accordingly. The deliberations of Churches are common property

nowadays, and every newspaper reader knows that it is a sense of decline and the melancholy testimony of half-empty churches and waning statistics which have given such desperate urgency to the union question. Should federation be achieved, every intelligent man will regard it as a counsel of despair which, even if carried with enthusiasm at headquarters, is adopted with only scant good grace locally. It requires considerable *naïveté* to imagine that such men will mistake a policy of expedience for the expression of Christian love.

One would not wish to minimise for a single moment the scandal and stain of denominational rivalry, or the ugliness of the conventional attitude of "Church" towards "Dissent." Nor is it possible to exaggerate the evil of a loveless and self-absorbed Church, split by petty internal quarrels and heedless of the need of a world of men. But the remedy for these evils lies not in sinking to the club level, or in seeking to enforce external union. That is not the way of adventure; it is an illicit short cut. The way of adventure is infinitely harder. The adventurous Church is the Church which, in days when far other ideals prevail, has the courage to remind herself and others of her true character as the Body of Christ, and of her primary function as a witness to a new life and to the fellowship of the redeemed.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find

that while no other book in the world lays such commanding emphasis upon the individual and inward character of true religion, it is also emphatically the book of the Church. Its background is the Christian community—a community founded upon the redeemed personality, yet something far more than a mere association of persons; an organic whole, whose corporate life is something over and above the sum of the lives of its members; the body of believers, who can give to God together that which not the greatest of them can give to God by himself. The primitive Church as reflected in St. Paul's Epistles was no ideal society. It was torn by violent and often ignoble dissensions, marred by spiritual crudeness, weakened at times by an explicitly carnal temper, imperilled by frequent relapses into pagan immorality; it was, in short, open to the gravest and most unanswerable criticism. Yet St. Paul, whose pen set down its weaknesses and defections with such remorseless fidelity, sees it as the Body and Bride of Christ, an extension, as it were, of the Incarnation. Christ is her Head; her life is inextricably intertwined with His Divine life. Such a Church-consciousness lies at the very root of New Testament Christianity, and our present-day criticism of the Church fails because we have no great constructive doctrine of the Church to determine and guide it. It is only as we see her defects as blemishes and wounds in the Body of Christ that our criticism will be

profound and searching enough to probe her sore. There is no room for unreality here. To see the Church as the Body of Christ does not mean to ignore her actual condition, but to discern the Church that is yet to be actualised. We are not yet a Church; we are growing a Church, just as we are slowly evolving a soul. The Church that is, exists for the sake of the Church that is to be; and it is only in the name of the Church that is to be that we may presume to lay the finger of blame upon the Church that is. There is only one hope for the Church, and that is her growing to be actually what she is already potentially and ideally—the Body of Christ bearing His marks, having fellowship in His sufferings, caring more for His travail than for a creditable balance-sheet, concentrating not upon the social amenities of the common room, but upon the sacrificial fellowship of the altar.

This conviction pledges us to the difficult and unpopular task of witnessing to the New Testament doctrine of the Church, and seeking to build up the Christian society in conformity with it. The programme—if such it can be called—seems dry and uninviting by the side of social campaigns and other popular movements; but it enshrines that victorious, creative principle which in Apostolic times built a new world out of the ruins of an old one, and has been the soul of every vital and fruitful movement throughout

the Church's history. We stand for a Church, not "broad-based upon the people's will," but deeply grounded in her Lord's Being—a Sacramental Church, exemplifying within the State a new type of life destined to supersede the State.

## III

To say that the primary function of the Church is worship is to run counter to present-day feeling; yet, did we only go deep enough, we would surely recognise that the instinct for worship lies deep in humanity, and is often not merely present but clamant when outward appearances least betray it. But, as we have pointed out before, there is a widespread indifference to worship, due to the fact that while preaching, social effort, and other Church activities have to a greater or lesser extent kept pace with the times, public worship has remained stagnant, and largely tends, not merely to bore, but actually to irritate, the man of candid mind who is not versed in its traditional phraseology, and whose sense of reality is outraged by its conventionalities. Yet worship is the natural expression of the redeemed life; it rises and falls with the flow and ebb of the soul. Wherever formalism, or a false sense of corporateness, has weakened the individual's hold upon God, there worship is not the spontaneous outcome of life but a theoretical problem. In such a case discussion and

small reforms are of little avail, and the "new" Catholicism is as powerless to raise the dead as the "old" Protestantism. It is at such times, when life has failed at its sources, that attempts are made to introduce a liturgical form of worship into the Free Churches. That there is something in a liturgical form of worship which meets a real need, and saves from many devotional excesses and excrescences, will be conceded by most thinking men. Many not trained in liturgical forms are welcoming them now as an important element in worship; but the conviction remains with them that the minister who surrenders his right to voice the soul of his people in favour of a purely liturgical service, is proclaiming his bankruptcy and committing the Church to impoverishment and retrogression. We have to beware of trying to meet a fundamental evil with such superficial remedies as a change in the form of worship. That change stimulates the soul is, of course, a psychological fact; but here as everywhere it holds that we must first make the tree good and the fruit will take care of itself. Given a Church that realises her responsibility as the awakener and nourisher of spiritual life, worship will once more become a living spring.

An Anglican chaplain, commenting upon the fact that class prejudice and snobbery disappear when men are actually facing the foe, but reassert themselves in exact proportion to the men's distance from the firing line, remarked that the

reason why the Church is torn and weakened by petty disputes and mean rivalries is that she has never really "gone over the top." The ignoble dissensions which flourish in the atmosphere of her ordinary services would soon disappear—they do, in fact, disappear—the moment she goes forth to war. Let her set herself to tackle seriously the great problems of poverty, ignorance and vice, and good-bye to all petty wranglings! Lifelong prejudices and antagonisms have a way of melting into thin air when the servants of Christ meet at the deathbeds of the poor to join in challenging the grim forces of evil that threaten the life of the nation. This contention, however, while expressing an obvious truth, rests upon a false conception of worship. To assume that the regular ordinances of the Church are a shallower thing than its philanthropy, or even its evangelism, is to stand on dangerous ground. Did we but realise it, there is nothing more wonderful in a world full of wonders than a company of human beings lifting their hearts to God in unity. There is nothing more transcendently wonderful than a body of believers met to adore and praise their Lord and Saviour—nothing more fit to make wise men tremble and strong men bow their souls in reverence. Nor is true worship the tame and static thing which this chaplain, and not a few others, assume it to be. Where it is static it lacks the specific quality of Christian worship. For Christian wor-

ship is not the luxury of emotional souls: it is a battleground. Wherever a soul, or a company of souls, holds real converse with God, there rages a battle far more critical and momentous than any fought in the slums or in the gilded haunts of vice. Who can presume to estimate the Divine resources set in motion by one genuine prayer, or the hostile powers let loose against the praying soul? Had we but eyes to see and ears to hear, we could not enter the humblest Christian assembly without seeing the air thick with wings and hearing the clash of contending forces. And if a worshipping assembly is a thing of majesty, it is also a thing of loveliness. Could we but become conscious of the real worship of the Christian assembly, could we but hear the mighty and moving flow of the deep current of penitence and adoration, pleading and thanksgiving, aspiration and high resolve, that runs on beneath the audible service, our criticism of its weakness would be lost in an intense desire to make some real contribution, however slight and imperfect, to that hidden stream. There is ample room for frank and searching criticism of our public services; but such criticism is valid only in the measure in which we have a right conception of the nature and end of true Christian worship. Failing that, it is a sheer impertinence.

One does not need to borrow the grudging eye of the hostile critic, in order to realise that our public worship is not the thing of awe and

beauty which God intended it to be. We have lost that sense of wonder which is the soul of worship. The mysteries of the spiritual world do not dilate our hearts and bow our spirits, and the reason why our worship is so feeble and passionless is because it is not born of a genuine vision of the God who can only be seen with eyes of wonder. The Wesleys set the Christian heart of England a-singing, because they had recovered the sense of spiritual wonder for their generation. Their hymns throb with adoring, joyous, passionate worship, because they are the lyric expression of wonder. "Where shall my wondering soul begin?" is the question that pulses through them—a question the average Christian does not dream of asking to-day. For with all our sharpened discernment and heightened sensibility, we bring dull and dreary eyes to the mystery of a Redemption whose roots are lost in the abysmal being of God, and of a Grace that is the very flower of His holy Heart of Love. Nor is our worship eloquent of spiritual joy. It is, indeed, strangely impotent to convey the beauty and joyous vitality of Christian discipleship. Men who chance to come to our services and meetings find, instead of the sparkling cup of life abundant, the stale lees of mechanically accepted religious conventions. Instead of a freshness like that of sunlit, pulsing seas, they find a dullness and flatness of spirit more akin to the weariness of the worldling than to the immortal

youth of the soul that lives in God. In place of a breadth and spaciousness as of the open sky, they are conscious of a protracted horizon—a pettiness of soul which repels their most generous instincts. They hear prayers for the prodigal recited in the prim and frigid tone of the Elder Brother, and psalms of feasting sung by men whose pinched aspect spells starvation.

And while the air is full of schemes and suggestions for the relief of this famine of worship, some of the methods recently tried in various quarters are based upon genuine needs. The movement, especially, known as the Fellowship of Silence is full of promise. Silence is not merely an important part of worship: it is its vital atmosphere, the background against which the spoken word utters itself with compelling power. Corporate silence, rightly understood, is a strong, soldier-like attitude, having nothing in common with the vacant day-dreaming and deliberate self-hypnotism that are substituted for it in certain latter-day cults. It is not merely a subduing and stilling of the soul under the power of God's presence: it is a going forth of the whole personality towards God in active resolution and aspiration. It is a great and sorely neglected discipline, making a highway for God through the wilderness of our vagrant thoughts and wayward emotions. It reveals what speech conceals, eating away our hidden unrealities, showing us our bankruptcy, revealing

the emptiness that so often underlies our glib devotions.

But the adventurous Church will go behind schemes and suggestions to the fundamental lack in our worship. In the last resort, men remain untouched by awe and wonder and unirradiated by joy, not because the conventional forms of worship do not give scope to these qualities, but because they have never really seen God as their Maker and Redeemer. It was never more true than to-day that while many have heard of God by the hearing of the ear, few can say, " Mine eyes have seen Thee." The Church's supreme task, no matter what her friends advise or her enemies reproach her with, is to tell men that there is a direct, immediate, transforming vision of God ; that they can see Jesus and be clothed with His deathless life—nay, that to see God thus is man's first business, beside which all worldly gain and all merely external morality or philanthropy are as dross. The Church that dares to utter this burden, regardless of the jibes and reproaches she is sure to incur from those who construe her mission in social and philanthropic terms, is the Church that will conquer with the victory of God. Once she has really staked her very existence upon the great adventure, she will no longer ask: How large is my membership ? How many scholars can my schools boast of ? How can I fill my buildings and keep my funds in a flourishing condition ? Her great

questions will rather be: How many within my pale know God in any deeper, more dynamic way than as a good, kind, almighty Being, concerned with their temporal welfare, and possibly a few urgent spiritual needs? How many have so seen Jesus that they have indeed become other than they were? How many of my workers are dominated by a vision which sees, beyond philanthropic and religious activities, a Kingdom which is peace and joy and love in the Holy Spirit? How many of those who have come within the range of my influence have been stirred to pant after God as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks? The ages wait for the Church that can look upon the man who asks for a fair chance in life, and dares to say to him first of all, "Thy sins be forgiven thee"; who can face the masses that come to her for material relief but care little for their inward misery, and say boldly, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

We are told again and again that men nowadays are temperamentally averse to the inward and worshipful side of religion; that the only way to approach them is through their social sympathies. That is not so, however. The human heart has not lost its ancient craving for a God to worship and adore. Not long ago a clergyman noticed five rough men who on a rainy night had dropped in to a popular service.

They evidently felt supremely uncomfortable in their unaccustomed surroundings, and tried to relieve their feelings by whispering, chuckling, fidgeting about in their seats, showing in every possible way their not ill-natured contempt for the whole proceedings, and finally walking out in the middle of a prayer to the great relief of their neighbours. The following week the clergyman, in paying an evening call on one of his parishioners, met one of those five men on the stair. He was living in the house, and just about to leave for the Front. The clergyman invited himself to his room for a free and easy chat, and was greatly surprised when the man, gulping down his shyness, asked him to pray. He did so, and then his host told him how " queer " he and his mates had felt that night in church, sitting among all those " toffs " who knew exactly what to do. They felt glad to get out of it, but—— " We wouldn't mind praying and all that sort of business if we knew a bit more about it. There's something in it, you know. We weren't brought up religious, never bothered about God ; but we've often said to one another, This sort of life isn't half good enough. You know what I mean." Wherever one goes, in train or omnibus, club or workshop, one comes across men and women discussing eagerly, and often with an unashamed wistfulness, the deep things of religion. Is it possible to know God, to hear His voice, to be conscious of a call from

the deeps to the deeps, to see with a clearness that cannot be denied the things eternal, to possess a new power, a new motive, a hidden, living spring of joy and healing which sweetens all bitterness and makes the wilderness of life to blossom as the rose? These are the questions that meet us on the lips of not a few whom theorists write down as impervious to the mystical aspect of religion.

And in answering these questions through her worship, the Church must, as we have already said, put the sacramental and the sacrificial element into its very centre. For the vision must begin in the household of faith. Though the moving of a leaf in the garden may reveal God to the soul as effectively as a sermon, yet neither the ministry of nature nor the spoken word is the deepest channel of that revelation. It is not with the eye of the mind that we see God, but with the love of the heart!

> Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face;
> Here would I touch and handle things unseen.

It is through a Sacrament which represents God's uttermost self-giving—through a Divine Act in which the floods of our devotion and consecration are unsealed, as the greater floods of Christ's mighty passion beat upon the gates of selfishness and low desire—that we shall see God and live.

## IV

Nor can worship alone create and sustain that vision on a large scale ; * it must be conjoined with the preaching of the Word. History makes short work of the contention that preaching " may be necessary in a weak and languishing state, but it is an instrument which Scripture, to say the least, has never recommended." † Wherever worship has been disjoined from preaching for any length of time, it has degenerated into mechanism and superstition, taking on grotesque forms and, in not a few instances, actually promoting profanity rather than reverence. Christian opinion has always swung to extremes in its estimate of the importance of preaching. On the one hand, it has relegated the preacher to the lowest place in the economy of the Church, and assented to conditions under which pulpit genius could not come to its own ; on the other hand, it has made of its places of worship mere " preaching-stations," put the sermon at the centre of worship—if worship, indeed, it could be called—regarded what is the heart and soul of worship as mere " preliminaries." Both extremes are detrimental to true worship. In the one case, worship becomes unintelligent, and crawls blindly where it ought to soar ; in the other, worship

* That it can do so in individual cases is not denied.

† " Tracts for the Times," quoted in J. H. Blunt's " Directorium Pastorale," p. 99.

is swamped, not necessarily by intellectual interests—the type of preaching which reduces worship to an irksome accessory is not nearly as intellectual as it seems—but more often by a preoccupation with the romantic and emotional, if not sentimental, aspects of religion.

We have dealt elsewhere with the importance of the pulpit as a teaching institution. Here we are concerned with the relation of the Preacher to the life of the Church. There are signs of a revival of the tendency to consider preaching as an art and a profession, and to advocate a class of pulpit specialists analogous to the Preaching Orders in the Roman Catholic Church, or, at least, to set men of commanding pulpit gifts free to serve the whole Church, instead of confining their influence within the bounds of individual congregations—a course which for long has been the custom in Wales. A strong point in its favour is the stimulus it gives to a truly prophetic ministry. We need the preacher who, untrammelled by previous knowledge of his audience, shall utter the word the Lord has put into his mouth, without stopping to wonder if anyone present is ripe to receive it. Such a preacher will, for example, voice a stern and searching Divine demand, and the frivolous woman he does not know and cannot see from the pulpit will so respond that her past is a dream, and her life begins from that moment. Had he seen her, let alone been acquainted with

her, he might have toned his message down to her supposed capacity, and she would have remained as she was. It is for lack of such preaching that many a God-haunted soul does not get out of the twilight, and many a striving spirit lingers behind its destiny. To speak the word which the soul did not dream of, but which none the less it recognises immediately as the key-word of its life, to send forth the fiery arrow of God that speeds straight to an unseen mark, to utter the vision, though it be as to the blind —that is the type of *propheteia* for lack of which whole fields ripe unto harvest remain unreaped.

And yet, in spite of this, the tendency to pulpit specialism is to be deprecated. The Church is never left without prophets to whom no ordinary rules apply; and these should be liberated to follow their calling. But to create a class of mere preachers would be to create a type of preaching perilous to the preacher himself, and, in the long run, injurious to the hearer. The preacher who does not live in close contact with a definite community, and who comes into touch only with those who are attracted by his preaching, tends to become hard in proportion to his skill in rousing the emotions, and shallow in proportion to his constant occupation with the deep, prophetic aspects of religion. Except in rare cases, the preacher's calling is to be a pastor as well as a prophet, and a priest far more than a mere religious consultant. His

privilege is to preach as a *pastor;* that is, straight out of his intimate and sympathetic knowledge of his own people. The modern tendency is for preachers to address themselves either to a section of their congregation—that section which responds to their message and invites their personal friendship—or to that mythical monster called "the modern mind." Theoretically speaking, their interests and sympathies range over a far wider sphere than those of their predecessors; in reality, their scope is often far narrower than that of many an old-time parish minister who lived among his people and knew them intimately and lovingly. Men of that time had a grip and a "bite" in the pulpit, a mellowness of sympathy and a shrewdness of judgment, which present-day preaching largely lacks. Nothing, indeed, is more characteristic of the modern ministry than its poor skill in the cure of souls—an art which neither pastoral visitation nor private consultation, neither the Bible Class nor the Confessional, can teach, but which is the secret of those who really live with souls, sharing their joys and bearing their sorrows. It is for want of such long and patient living alongside of their people that preachers of to-day are lacking in genuine insight into concrete moral and spiritual difficulties.

Our increasing anxiety to draw "outsiders" into the Church has made the preacher's position doubly difficult. It is so easy for preachers of

popular gifts to gain an audience, and at the same time lose a church; to lecture, rather than preach, on popular topics so interestingly and piquantly as to disappoint and, in the end, alienate those who come to church for spiritual reinforcement, teaching and comfort. He succeeds in attracting non-churchgoers, but he has lost that Christian community atmosphere which is his most powerful instrument for deepening and spiritualising that attraction. There is no other way of reclaiming a neglected child than by bringing it into a true family atmosphere. What it needs is a home; you cannot win it by remanding it to a workhouse and instructing the chaplain to give it weekly lectures on gentleness and affection. The preaching that merely gathers an audience must fail unless it has the spiritual family behind it. The preacher who does not build a church writes his message in water. He has a duty to his own people which no amount of enthusiasm for the unchurched masses can absolve him. His first task is to prophesy to the dry bones—to the conventional, worldly church members that are his cross; to break his heart over them, to spend upon them some of that passion and persuasiveness he is so ready to pour out upon those who are not of his flock. This duty does not interfere with the wider ministry to which he is equally called; on the contrary, to neglect it is the surest way to hinder that wider ministry. The Church has suffered more

than many are ready to admit from the perversity of preachers who imagine that it is over the bodies of their people, so to speak, that they can best march to the conquest of the masses.

## V

All this does not imply, as many seem to think, a narrow "conventicle ideal," which construes the Church as a "little Bethel" for a few pale and pious souls, regarding a small membership as the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. What it does imply is a firm resolve to appeal to what is at once the deepest and the most universal instinct in man—his affinity for the living God, and to recall men from the surface life of the senses and the brain to their hidden Centre. To say that this narrows the Church is a libel on mankind. The Church that resolutely stands for the spiritual first, and for social interests only as the natural outcome of a truly spiritual conception of life, may not appeal to the masses in the sense of gathering large crowds (except to hear preachers of outstanding ability); but it will appeal to the best in every man, and her very existence will be a wholesome prick, a haunting reminder, in the minds of thousands who never darken her doors. To insist that mass-attraction is the criterion of the Church's health is to fall back into that vicious habit which sees the supreme object of

a Church in touting for members ; in other words, in struggling to keep alive and vigorous. Such a Church deserves to die. But once we recognise that the purpose of the Church is not a continual membership campaign, but to serve the world in Christ's name, and that her best service—the service which she alone can render—is to bear living witness to man's new life in Christ Jesus and to incarnate that witness in a community which may be relatively small but must be genuinely Christian, the question of attracting the masses sinks into sheer irrelevancy. The true Church will be alert and aggressive. She will use the best insights and instincts of the age, speak to men in the language of the day, and proclaim a Gospel to which nothing human is alien. But her first concern will be, not to vindicate her life, but to live it. She is first a witness, and only second an apologist. Her ministers are not primarily organisers and masters of ceremonies, who can turn their congregations into cheerful clubs with a craze for small philanthropies ; they are not even prophets or teachers merely, but priests of a holy community. They are there to build that Jerusalem which will be the praise of the whole earth. Only let it be built truly and well with the stones of sacrifice, and every road thereto shall resound with the tramp of pilgrim feet.

It is out of the Church's deepest life that her social crusade will spring. To-day she is asked

to take her rightful place at last as the leader of humanitarian crusades, the champion of the poor and weak, and the terror of wealthy evil-doers. The demand is a righteous one, and it is to the Church's shame that it still remains a mere demand. But the adventurous Church, while responding to it, will also insist that judgment must begin with the House of God. It is not the dishonest company promoter, the trafficker in human beings, the wealthy brewer and the conscienceless capitalist who loom most largely in her membership; but the petty profiteer, the dishonest tradesman, the conscienceless artisan, the small employer who is a bully and a skinflint, the business man who takes advantage of his customers' ignorance. It is with them she will deal first. This is not a question of comparing the sins of petty defaulters with the crimes of rich oppressors. The point is that these petty defaulters are to be found in large numbers inside the Church, and that it is her duty to address herself to them. Such a course demands courage of a type almost defunct in these days, when we need the support of big movements and influential platforms to stiffen our backbone sufficiently to denounce evil. It involves the kind of preaching that will, in some cases, leave the preacher wondering how much longer he will be allowed to occupy his pulpit. It may end in the Church having to go into the wilderness. Nothing strikes one as more ominous than the silence of the Church on

such a subject as profiteering, coupled with the persistent tendency of the pulpit to denounce social evils whose representatives or advocates are rarely found within a place of worship. The need is for preachers who will make their own people understand that social service is not primarily running clubs and institutes, sitting on municipal committees, or working in connection with social organisations; but doing honest work —the best that training and diligence can produce, and the most useful that is within the workers' capacity. The preacher who is not afraid to tell his young people that to do no work, or to do one's work badly, perfunctorily or superficially, is to defraud the community and sin against God and man, and who will persist in preaching this bracing doctrine even though it means that the best of his young people decide to attend extra evening classes instead of church clubs and societies, is a true prophet, and does social service of the best type. The same may be said of the preacher who attacks boldly the only kind of competition that is inherently evil —competition in spending. Who does not know the good church-going father of a family who makes £800 a year more or less dishonestly, but would infinitely prefer to make £200 a year honestly, did not his womenfolk insist on "climbing" in the social scale and being at least as well dressed and as luxuriously housed as their neighbours? The Church that sets her face like a

flint against a pseudo-humanitarian conception of life which regards the minimum of work and the maximum of money and pleasure as the *summum bonum*, holds that it is the State's chief function to relieve the individual of responsibility, and expects State and Church to unite in making moral grit unnecessary by removing awkward temptations out of people's way, is the truly adventurous Church.

To say that the Church exists to witness to a new life and to witness to it first of all by living it, is to say that she is pledged to sacrifice. Those who read the many articles on the defects and failings of the Church which appear almost weekly in our newspapers, written for the most part by thoughtful laymen, must be struck by the fact that these writers very rarely mention Jesus or His Cross (except as a symbol for sacrifice in general), and by their almost unanimous insistence upon a teaching ministry which shall make Christianity both reasonable and popular. "Religion," says one of them, "must be taught as intelligently as any science if it is to be of any service to man." If one were to reply that the kind of religion that the Church stands for—the religion of Jesus Christ—is not a thing that can be "taught" in the intellectualist sense of the term, nor a thing that is "of service to man"; that it is a life, a power which does not wait upon man's suffrages, but appropriates him rather than is appropriated by him, one

would probably be written down as a narrow fanatic. And the first lesson our young leaders and prophets have to learn is to be content to be accounted mediæval and fanatical by men of really fine and lovable spirit, in sympathy with much that Christ lived and died for. This is harder by far than to endure the contempt and hostility of men of coarse fibre and evil mind, who lack all instinct for the things that are lovely and of good report; but it is the only way for a Church that has taken up the Cross. This is a sacrifice that makes no dramatic appeal, excites no sympathy; evokes only impatience, antagonism and contempt. It is so hard, indeed, that it can only be made in union with Him who plumbed its bitterest deeps. To combat the good which is the foe of the best takes courage of the noblest type, the courage of true love.

To-day the Church's path is hid in mist. Only one thing is sure: the Cross waits behind the dim shadows. She will not go very far before she will be called to sacrifice. During a certain public discussion on the proposed Free Church Federation, a leading representative of one of the Churches concerned tried to reassure those who were shivering on the brink that entrance into the Federation involved "no sacrifice whatever" of denominational characteristics; it was nothing more alarming than a scheme for mutual reinforcement and collective effectiveness. Unwittingly the speaker laid his finger upon the

most damning factor in all such schemes. The Church is still seeking to strengthen and enlarge herself with the minimum of sacrifice. The union she strives for is not the meeting of brothers, in which much is joyfully sacrificed and love the only end ; it is the amalgamation of rival firms who know themselves too weak to continue rivals. Her evangelism is not a selfless, brave witness, born of pure love to God and man, but an accommodation with a view to popularity. It is this calculating temper that makes one tremble for the future of the Church.

Only the adventurous Church will save her soul alive, and in doing so will save the world. The adventurous Church does not scheme or calculate. She has no programme and engineers no campaigns. She lives by her vision of God. Her only policy is to follow her Lord. She sees Jesus walking in the midst of a broken, bleeding world, and she asks the old question, *Quo vadis, Domine ?* It is the only burning question in the whole world, and the only question that will not long remain unanswered. What the answer will be we cannot say yet, but we know that it will be eloquent of a Cross. In that sign the Church will conquer as Christ conquered.

Printed by Cassell & Company, Limited, La Belle Sauvage, London, E.C.4
F25.1218

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: April 2005

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION
111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 014 022 186 7